

# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH-APRIL 1994

## JOHN ROBINSON'S 10 BIG SHOWS COMBINED

THE MEETING OF KING SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.



THE QUEEN  
OF SHEBA  
AND HER

100 TERPSICHOREAN ARTISTS

WITH THE MAGNIFICENT SPECTACLE  
KING SOLOMON HIS TEMPLE AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Russell Morgan  
Illustrator & Designer  
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# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the  
Circus Historical Society

Vol. 38, No. 2

March-April 1994

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

In 1899 the John Robinson Circus featured an elaborate spectacle, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Robinson show was the only one other than Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros., Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. to present such a pageant.

The lithograph on the cover was used by the show that year. It was printed by Russell-Morgan a division of U. S. Printing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. The original is in the Library of Congress collection.

## ERRATA

Two astute readers, both rightly passionate about historical accuracy, noted factual errors in the article "The Circus Year in Review 1993 Season" in the January-February *Bandwagon*. One pointed out that the Lee Stevens family has a baboon act, not a chimp act as reported. The other observed that the Carson and Barnes Circus obtained a new rhino and giraffe in 1993, rather than a rhino and hippo as was stated.

## DUES NOTICES MAILED

CHS dues and subscription notices will be mailed in April. Secretary-Treasurer Dale Haynes will appreciate your mailing your check or money order in the return

envelope provided. Please check your address and zip code and advise any corrections.

If your payment is not received by June 15, 1994 your July-August *Bandwagon* will not be mailed.

Individuals can show their support for the CHS by becoming Sustaining, Contributing and Concessionaires Club members by paying \$25, \$50 or \$100, rather than the standard rate of \$19. Over 250 sent extra amounts last year.

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## 1994 CHS CONVENTION

It's sunny Sarasota in December. CHS President Fred Dahlinger has selected Sarasota, Florida as the location of the 1994 Circus Historical Society convention. The dates are December 7 to 10.

The activities will include a visit to the Showfolks of Sarasota Circus, produced this year by long time CHS member George Hubler. An exciting program recognizing both celebrities of the past and impresarios of today is being arranged. Visitations to locations prominent in circus history may also be a part of the schedule.

Members who desire to present papers, provide movie and video footage for showing or donate material to the CHS auction are urged to contact Fred Dahlinger.

Details of the convention hotel and meeting location will be in the May-June *Bandwagon*.

## NEW MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

As noted in the last issue a new directory of Circus Historical Society members is now available. If you wish to receive a copy write to the editor.

## 1994 CHS CONVENTION

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**B**ud E. Anderson was king of the high grass showmen in the 1930s and 40s. Born Fred Elliott Anderson on October 25, 1894 in Emporia, Kansas, he was the son of an engineer on the Burlington railroad. After completing the fourth grade he decided school was a waste of time. In 1912 he went to Oklahoma and worked on a ranch where his interest and understanding of horses was further developed. From that time on he dressed in cowboy boots and a western Stetson.

Around 1914 he went to Los Angeles to work in the movies.

Cowboys were in demand as extras in westerns. He quit when he was asked to play the part of an Indian. He worked at the San Diego Exposition in 1915.

By age twenty Anderson had established his life's principals. He never drank, never swore, never told a dirty story and never had anything bad to say about anyone.

In 1918 and 1919 he worked for Lucky Bill Newton. It was here that Anderson learned the art of operating a high grass circus, playing small towns. By the early 1920s he had organized his first circus.

According to son Norman "Luke" Anderson, his father's big feature his first years was a large snake. He worked most of the show himself. His wife sold tickets, drove a wagon from town to town, fed the four or so people with it and took care of young Norman, then about five years of age. The first show had no lights, prohibiting a night performance.

The Emporia *Daily Gazette* of April 15, 1940 mentioned an early Anderson operation: "Almost twenty years ago we were riding west on Sixth Avenue and we saw a bear chained to a stake in a front yard. We stopped and were standing at a safe distance, looking at the bear, when a tall, slim man came out and began helping us

The Anderson Bros. World Toured Show advance truck in 1925. Luke Anderson collection.

# Bud E. Anderson's JUNGLE ODDITIES AND 3 RING CIRCUS

Season of 1939  
By Joseph T. Bradbury



Bud E. Anderson at about age twenty-two. Luke Anderson collection.

watch the bear. Finally after a lot of questions, he admitted it was his bear and that he was making a circus. He was painting an old grocery wagon with fire engine red paint and was worrying about what he would do for a tent. A few days later he left town and we forgot all about him.

The following summer were returning from Topeka and we saw a show poster in Lebo, advertising an animal show there that evening. Returning to Lebo with a car load in the evening, we found the show lot and paid fifteen cents each to get into a little spot about the size of the average front yard, which was walled in with canvas. Pitched on a seat in a small sec-

tion of circus bleachers at one side of the enclosure, about 75 persons saw the same tall, slim fellow and a helper put the bear through some stunts, ride a trick mule, do some fancy roping and preside over some trained dogs. The Emporian finally had his show going and he gave the little audience its fifteen cents worth."

Anderson Bros. World Toured Show was off and running, slogging its way over the muddy rural roads of Kansas. By 1925 the show was using a fifty foot big top with two thirties and had added some trucks.

Continuing under the same title the circus grew each year. In 1930 Anderson took an indoor variety show called Seal Bros. to Texas. The Seal title was used on the tent show in 1931, the first season that Anderson used merchant tickets. In spite of the depression the show made real money.

In 1932 an enlarged show opened in Texas. It traveled on nineteen trucks and trailers, carried fifteen head of horses and ponies and used a fifty foot big top with three thirties. In 1933 Anderson bought his first elephant from William P. Hall.

During the winter season Anderson always took extra jobs to make more money to outfit his circus. He worked as a taxi driver, butcher in a market and drove a gravel truck, among other work.

In 1934 he bought two more elephants, and equipped the show with Ford trucks. In mid-season he traded all the Fords for Chevys. From that point on he basically used Chevrolet trucks. The show achieved a first for a truck circus by giving a matinee in Searcy, Arkansas and an evening show in Bald Knob on October 25. The show wintered at the fair grounds in Fredonia, Kansas.

The 1934 tour was the most financially successful season to date. General agent

The 1933 Seal Bros. marquee. Laura Anderson is sixth from left and Bud is fifth from right. Luke Anderson collection.





Semi-trailer under construction at the Emporia, Kansas winter quarters in 1939. Circus World Museum collection.

John Foss took the show to Minnesota for 54 stands. The show played only in Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Missouri and Arkansas, all traditional high grass territory. Son Luke estimates that the show cleared \$100,000 that season, really big money for the depression. The show went to Emporia, where Anderson had bought a farm. A training barn, mechanical shop and horse barn were constructed.

The Seal show continued to grow and in 1937 featured a fine street parade with most units pulled by horses or ponies. This show, using all new white canvas, appears to have been the finest circus Anderson toured during his career. Following the 1937 season Seal Bros. was sold to Charles Parker and Ira M. Watts.

A part of the purchase was the continued use of Anderson's Emporia winter quarters during the winter of 1937-1938. The new owners continued the parade with their Parker & Watts Circus in 1938-39.

Anderson remained out of the business only a few months. He then began a pattern which he followed at least three different times during his career by selling one show only to frame another. The time between selling and building ranged from only a few months to a couple of years. In May 1938 he purchased the Norris Bros. Circus from Charles LaMont, a small motorized show moving on about eight trucks.

The May 28, 1938 *Billboard* reported: "Fred (Bud) Anderson of Emporia, Kansas who last fall sold his Seal Bros. Circus to Charles Parker and Ira M. Watts has bought Nor-

ris Bros. Two Ring Circus. It was enlarged and reorganized. Anderson took out a license for 16 trucks." This was one of the few times Anderson's given name Fred appeared in print.

The "enlargement" was the addition of son Luke's concession trailer. Anderson continued to operate the show under the Norris Bros. title for the next six weeks before closing it on July 4 in Eads, Colorado. The show was sent to his winter quarters in Emporia, Kansas which had been the home of his Seal Bros. show for the past several years. It was here that the new Bud Anderson Circus was framed for the 1939 season. It would be considerably enlarged. The story of how it was built using equipment and animals from several circuses makes a fascinating story.

At the time as a young college student and circus fan I remember that the news in the *Billboard* about the new Anderson show was one of the few bright lights shining after the dark, dismal, and depressing 1938 season which saw the death of so many shows. The titles never again to appear were Hagenbeck-Wallace, Tim McCoy, Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto, Tom Mix and Mighty Haag.

Another interesting aspect of the 1939

Aerial view of the 1939 Anderson show. Pfening Archives.



Big top pole and canvas semi-trailer used by Anderson in 1939. Circus World Museum collection.

Anderson story was the interchange of equipment and animals, especially elephants, between shows. This show presents a classic example. It was outlined in the February-March 1941 *White Tops*. Re-reading this inspired me to dig further into the 1939 show and to put it into print.

The article was titled, "Six shows in one" and read: "If it were possible to remove the succeeding layers of paint, one layer at a time, from many a gilded circus wagons, the many different titles revealed would show that the equipment of few businesses changed hands as frequently as does show property. This has been particularly true of railroad shows, and in recent years has been increasingly apparent on the motorized shows.

The 1939 Bud E. Anderson Jungle Oddities Circus presents one quite recent example. It could boast of equipment from more than a half dozen shows, the majority of which are now defunct.

"In 1938 Anderson purchased the complete outfit of Norris Bros. Circus from Charlie LaMont, and desiring to take out a larger show the next season added property from the Tom Mix Circus and several other shows.

"Using the Norris Bros. property as a nucleus, Mr. Anderson added a new big top for the 1939 season and the Norris top was used for the side show. Other equipment utilized from the same show included a ticket wagon, a fine cage wagon with an interesting display of wild animals, a property truck with a four wheel baggage trailer, and a



Light plant that had been on Jack Hoxie in 1937. Circus World Museum collection.

large semi-trailer unit that doubled as a bandwagon.

"From the late Tom Mix show Bud acquired the stake driver truck, the water wagon, cookhouse, two bull trucks and the elephant, Babe. Having also purchased the Max Gruber Oddities of the Jungle act that had been featured for several seasons on the Mix show, Mr. Anderson picked up a unique and clever title, 'The Jungle Oddities Circus.'

"Three baby elephants and a troupe of spotted horses were secured from Cole Bros. Circus and the Col. Tim McCoy Wild West was represented by a striped blue and white cookhouse top, side show canopy and a small band top.

The light plant truck was from the Kuhn Circus of 1936, it had also seen service on the Jack Hoxie Circus in 1937.

"Adding a large seat semi and a big top pole and canvas semi which were built at quarters, Anderson found his new show complete.

"Presenting a fine performance under the personal direction of the owner the Jungle Oddities Circus gained a reputation for being one of the best framed and fastest moving shows in the motorized field."

The following advertisement was in the

Stake driver bought from the Tom Mix Circus. Circus World Museum collection.



January 14, 1939  
*Billboard*, "At liberty, elephants acts. For sale or lease, small motorized circus complete. any part or all with or without animals. Bud E. Anderson, Emporia, Kansas."

This ad indicates that Anderson at the time had not fully decided to enlarge and operate the former Norris Bros. show himself since it was offered for sale or lease. However, the decision was soon made to go for it and return to the road with his own circus.

"Anderson bought a regular passenger ticket for each animal and it is almost certain that he had to pay full fare for the three baby elephants, even though they are under 12 years of age."

The February 25 *Billboard* announced his plans: "New show for Anderson. Buys property at Rochester, Indiana.

"Emporia, Kansas February 18. Bud E. Anderson of this city will have a new show on the road titled Bud E. Anderson's Jungle Oddities and 3 Ring Circus. It will move on 18 trucks. Anderson has operated an overland show for 20 years beginning with wagons and horses.

"He recently returned from Rochester, Indiana (Cole Bros. quarters) where he made a cash deal for a carload of equipment and animals. In shipment were three baby elephants (Modoc, Empress, Judy), two young camels, eight liberty horses, three menage, and three wild west horses, harness, saddles, and props for same. Show will have five elephants in all as Anderson owns the Max Gruber elephant (Eva), zebra act and an elephant (Babe) from the Tom Mix Circus. There will be several cages of cat animals, also 20 head of big horses and 10 head of Shetland ponies.

"Big top will be an 80 with two 30s and a 40; side show, a 60 with three 30s. All animals will be kept in kid show tent. Show will not parade. Two new light plants were received last week. A complete line of new and novel paper is being printed in flashy colors. The advance is practically all set.

"Most of the people

have been contracted. Bert Rickman, who has been with Anderson for several years except last season when he was with Parker Watts Circus, will be equestrian director."

The March 11 *Billboard* published a photo of Anderson with the cutline saying his new show would be titled Bud Anderson's Jungle Oddities and Circus and would be transported on 18 trucks.

The lengthy article also noted that George Duvall had been signed as general agent and had been in quarters the previous week conferring with Anderson. Jack Kofron had been signed as band director. Other notes said an order for new canvas and side show banners was recently given to Jimmy Morrisey of Baker and Lockwood. A specially designed line of paper accentuating the Jungle Oddities theme was being printed by Neal Walters. Eugene (Arky) Scott, M. F. (Alabama) Campbell and Frank Whalen arrived February 17 accompanying a baggage carload of animals which Anderson bought in Rochester, Indiana. About 500 folks, including school children, were at the Santa Fe station in Emporia to watch the unloading. W. M. Richards, superintendent of schools, chief of police Roy Clay, and mayor Frank Lostutter were among the onlookers. William Allen White's Emporia *Gazette* assigned a special reporter and photographer Gwendolyn Morgan to obtain a story. The *Gazette* titled it "Anderson's Noah's Ark."

The article continued by saying three more lions and a steel arena arrived from Los Angeles. Campbell, the ring stock boss, was working an eight horse liberty act and breaking a blindfolded liberty fire-jumping act in the ring barn. Superintendent Shorty Lynn, Loren Doyle, and W. M. Steventon and his crew were building wagons and cages. Whalen, in charge of elephants, was schooling the baby elephants of the herd, Modoc, Judy, and Empress. This was in error as the elephants were retrained by Anderson, Mac MacDonald and Matt Larish.

Rochester, Indiana was the quarters of the Cole Bros. and Robbins Bros. circuses. The parent company, the Indiana Circus Corporation, was bankrupt as a result of the terrible 1938 circus season. Cole Bros. had moved on 30 cars and Robbins on 15 and all of the property and animals were available for sale by the court appointed receiver. The former owners, Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell, were able to lease 20 cars for a smaller Cole Bros. to tour in 1939. A vast amount of property was available for sale to Anderson and any other buyers.

Shortly after the Rochester purchase Anderson turned his eyes and pocketbook westward to El Paso, Texas where the property and animals of the Tom Mix

Circus, also broke, were stored.

The March 18, 1939 *Billboard* told this story: "Disposal of property of the Tom Mix Circus was practically completed here this week."

"J. W. (Paddy) Conklin came in from the West Coast to meet Dail Turney, general manager of the Mix show and purchased all chairs, seats, light plant, big top, menagerie top, poles and rigging. Equipment will be shipped to Canada. Conklin left for Chicago and Turney returned to the West Coast."

"Bud E. Anderson was in town to purchase the show's stake driver, water wagon, cookhouse trailer and two semi-trailers from Carl Goodman, a used car dealer, who had purchased the rolling stock. Anderson was reported to have bought the P. A. system and other equipment."

"Meanwhile the show's trained horses and ponies remain under attachment by a

waiting for Dail Turney to arrive from Los Angeles. While riding around El Paso on a street car Luke noticed a number of Mix show trucks on the Carl Goodman used car lot. Goodman had bought the Mix rolling stock as a package.

The twenty-one year old son bought the stake driver, water wagon, cookhouse semi, a prop semi and tractors to pull the semis. The semis, stake driver and water wagon were \$250 each.

After Turney arrived he showed Luke a barn which stored various circus property. Poking through the barn Luke found all of the dinning equipment, a sound system, saddles, boots, wardrobe and other odds and ends. He got it all for \$100.

The cookhouse semi was loaded with all of the barn's contents. The water truck was loaded in the prop semi. Luke then headed back to Emporia with his loot.

When he drove into the Emporia quarters, he said his father had a fit. But when Bud found out what Luke had paid for the lot he was back in his father's good graces.

The stake driver from the Mix show was significant because of its origin. The unit drove three stakes at the same time, two at back one on right side, perhaps the first unit of its kind. It had been designed and built by Bill Curtis for the Sells-Floto show in the late 1920s. Photos of the unit on a Sells-Floto wagon show an old style flywheel Witte gasoline engine. This was replaced by a Ford engine when the unit was mounted on a truck by Mix. There were other small changes made by the Mix show, but careful examination of photos on Mix and Sells-Floto confirm that it is the same.

All of the former Mix trucks were Fords. They were quickly traded in for new Chevrolets by Anderson.

The February 18 Emporia *Gazette* told of the arrival of three baby elephants: "Three baby elephants, two shaggy camels, eight spotted horses, and two roaring lions, all in a Santa Fe baggage car with two bales of hay between each species, arrived in Emporia Friday afternoon from Rochester, Indiana, to become a part of Bud E. Anderson's



Side show bannerline in Sioux Falls, South Dakota May 21, 1939. Pfening Archives.

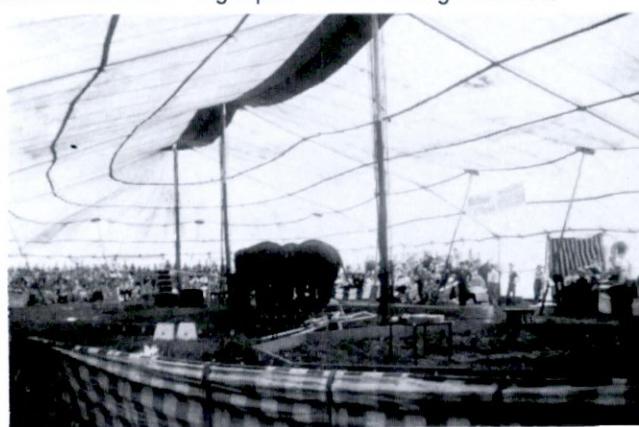
Jungle Oddities, which will leave its winter quarters a mile east of Emporia on highway 50S, on April 1 to go on the road."

News came rapidly from Anderson's quarters as he was framing his show. The March 25 *Billboard* reported: "Many folks are visiting the quarters of Bud Anderson's Jungle Oddities and 3 Ring Circus. Mr. Anderson's large ranch and modern quarters are located one and a half miles east of the city on U. S. Highway 50 south. The newly formed Kansas Industrial Committee is taking an active interest in the circus, having given the show wide publicity. The Emporia *Gazette* and radio station KTSW are generous with their stories.

"Recent developments indicate that the show will be considerably larger than originally estimated. Present plans disclose that approximately 25 motor transports will be essential to move the equipment.

"Bert E. Rickman, equestrian director in collaboration with L. DuBois of DuBois and Ensign, Kansas City, have completed designs for wardrobe and the opening

Elephants performing inside Anderson big top in 1939. Pfening Archives.



Bud E. Anderson and his elephants in the backyard in Washington, Kansas May 4, 1939. Pfening Archives.

court order on suit of Gladstone Shaw, former superintendent, for about \$600. Deputy sheriffs said they had been unable to serve Mix, cited as owner of the show. They said service may be sought by publication in time for trial of the suit by May 1."

Information in the article was not entirely correct. In truth, Anderson went to El Paso and bought the elephant Babe and the semi and an elephant semi.

No other Mix trucks were at the makeshift quarters. Anderson was under the impression that other trucks had been sold and were not available. He became ill in El Paso and phoned son Luke and told him to come there as he was going home. When Luke arrived he gave him some checks and told him to buy whatever he could.

Luke had to cool his heels in El Paso

spectacle. The spec will adhere to the Jungle Oddities theme throughout. The wardrobe department will soon be in full swing.

"According to Rickman the performance will be presented in three rings, on two stages, and in a steel arena, and will be given in two parts, the first to be devoted to the Jungle Oddities and the second to the circus performance.

"Mr. Anderson is negotiating for a very small white rhinoceros and a large anthropoid ape. He returned from Florida last week and immediately left for the east. [There was no further mention of the rhino and ape and is unlikely that either was obtained, or even sought.]

"Three Palomino stallions and one white Arabian stallion have been received. Alabama Campbell, ring stock boss, says that they are broken for fire jump, menage, waltzing, and rear up. The wild animal acts are shaping up satisfactorily.

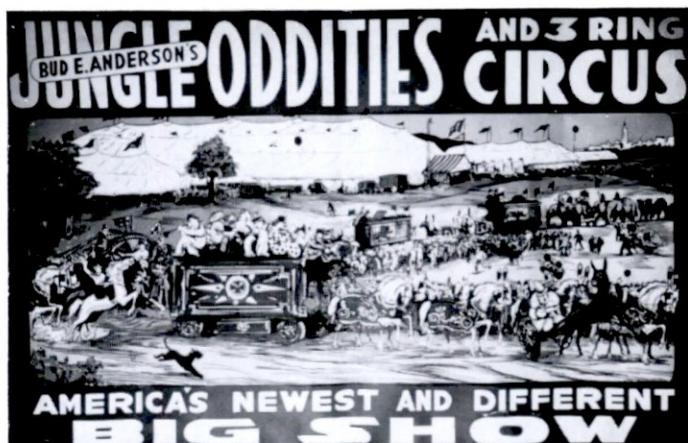
"Recently signed were Frank Ellis, banners; Ralph Noble, side show manager; Arthur and Marie Henry; Willis Sisters, Betty (Mrs. Joe B. Webb) and Ginger; and Ed Minze, paint department."

The April 8 *Billboard* headlined: "Anderson to have elaborate opening spectacle 'Borneo.'

"Anderson's Jungle Oddities and 3 Ring Circus opening spectacle Borneo will be a magnificent display. Elaborately costumed in radiant colors, illuminated with ground reflectors, color wheels and Kleig lights, Borneo will make its debut in the big top through a velvet draped Proscenium Arch. The spec is being produced by its originator Bert Rickman, equestrian director. Willard Romer has written the musical score.

"The color styling of the interior of the

Four wheeled ticket trailer used in 1939. Circus World Museum collection.



Anderson poster used in 1939. Pfening Archives.

big top by Marc Marcellus captures the modern mode with interesting effects in contrasting shades of red and blue combined with silver. Red and silver are used on the center poles and blue and silver on the quarter poles. The ring carpets are vivid red, centered with large silver monograms and encircled by blue and silver curbs.

"A mirror studded band shell, enhanced by an arcade of neon lights, will set off Jack Kofron's 12 piece band. During the main performance amplifiers will carry the music to all parts of the big top with equal intensity.

"The midway will be illuminated by a Broadway lighting system making use of 20 floodlights.

"Ralph Noble, kid show manager, announced that the show will be presented on ten stages. New double-decked banner fronts, especially designed for the show, were delivered this week. Also a recently delivery is the restyled marquee, which is a revolutionary departure from the standard design. It was erected by Shorty Lynn, superintendent, and his assistants.

"With the opening day fast approaching, all departments are in full swing. Felix Duvall, general agent, is prospecting territory. Mac MacDonald

has replaced Frank Whalen in the elephant department."

A week later the trade publication reported that G. Felix Duvall and E. R. Webb, brigade agent, were in Kansas City where they loaded two trucks with paper from the U. S. Printing & Engraving Co. plant, which made a full line of wall work and furnished the dates and banners. The window work was furnished by the Erie Litho Co. and Central Show Print, all special designed paper. Eight men were to be on the advance with Frank Ellis one day ahead. Special school tickets were to be used only for the afternoon performance.

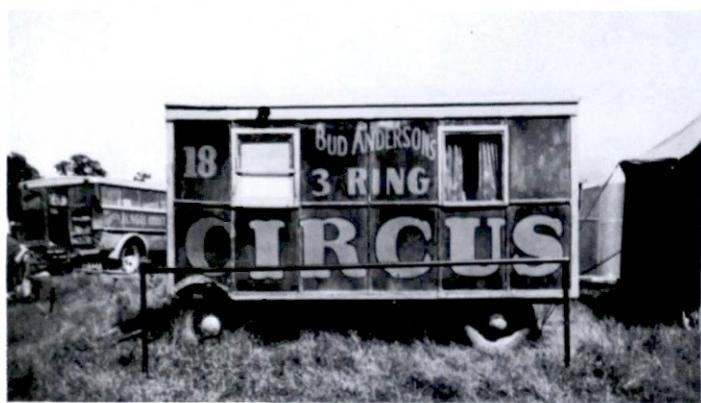
The Emporia *Gazette* published an extensive article on the Anderson show in the April 19 issue. It read in part: "The new 3-ring motorized circus which Fred E. 'Pud' Anderson has assembled the past several months at his headquarters, 1 1/2 miles east of Emporia, will open its 1939 season Friday afternoon for a 2-day stand on the Katy show grounds. The premier of the circus, two on Friday and two on Saturday, are under the auspices of the Emporia Parent-Teacher association, which reports good advance ticket sales. The Emporia schools will close on Friday.

"Mr. Anderson's, billed as Bud E. Anderson's 3 Ring Circus and Jungle Oddities, is a new show almost entirely. Only one act which has appeared here with Anderson's other circuses will be used. That act is the Henry Duo, a team of aerialists,

"All the canvas for the eight tents of the circus is new. The big top is the largest ever used by Anderson according to Bert Rickman, veteran equestrian director. This tent will be nearly 200 feet long and about 70 feet wide.

"To put the circus caravan in tip-top shape, Mr. Anderson bought eight new trucks, has built new trailers and has reconditioned all the other rolling stock ac-

Anderson elephant semi-trailer No. 24 in 1939. Circus World Museum collection.



quired since last summer from several circuses.

"Some of the trucks and semi-trailers are unusually large. One is divided into stalls for four horses and a half a dozen ponies. One trailer will carry three elephants and other equipment. The cookhouse trailer, carrying a standard sized cook stove burning either coal or wood and in addition to other heavy kitchen equipment, carries a large storage refrigerator holding 1,200 pounds of ice. The cookhouse trailer unit also is equipped with a 15 kilowatt electric generator to provide an individual lighting system for the cookhouse and dining tent.

T. Cobb is the circus cook. As soon as the circus opens, Cobb will be preparing three meals daily for more than 100 persons. Tuesdays night Cobb prepared dinner for 57 persons and after all the circuses performers arrive Thursday for a dress rehearsal, the show personnel will go on 'full feed.'

The circus, exclusive of the concert attraction, will carry 20 horses, 13 ponies and a trick mule. Practically all of these animals will have parts in the main show and have been in recent training for their acts under the direction of Alabama Campbell. Anderson's new show has a 8-horse liberty act, which formerly appeared with Cole Bros. show.

Among the rolling stock is a heavy truck equipped with a motor driven stake driver, acquired from the Tom Mix show, and a heavy water tank which also carries fire fighting equipment. The show also has three electric generating plants, with Joe Campbell in charge as electrician. Each time the circus sets up, about a dozen hookups will have to be made to provide lights.

Mr. Rickman believes no other motorized circus this season will carry as many as five elephants. The Anderson herd of five will make several appearances in the main show. Mac MacDonald is the boss elephant man, and will put three of the smallest elephants through a routine of about 40 tricks, lasting six minutes, in the center ring. Mr. Anderson will handle an attractive 15 minute elephant and zebra act. He bought this act last season and appeared with it in indoor circuses. The largest el-



Letterhead used by Anderson in 1939, printed in orange and blue. The same design was used in newspaper ads. Pfening Archives.

ephant, which weighs about 8,500 pounds, is believed to be around 60 years old.

Other feature acts of the circus include the Suez family, a group of six Mexican acrobats, for the first time with a circus touring the United States.

The Yoshada Japanese troupe includes four persons booked as foot jugglers and acrobats. Two men and two women make up the Silverlake troupe of aerialists.

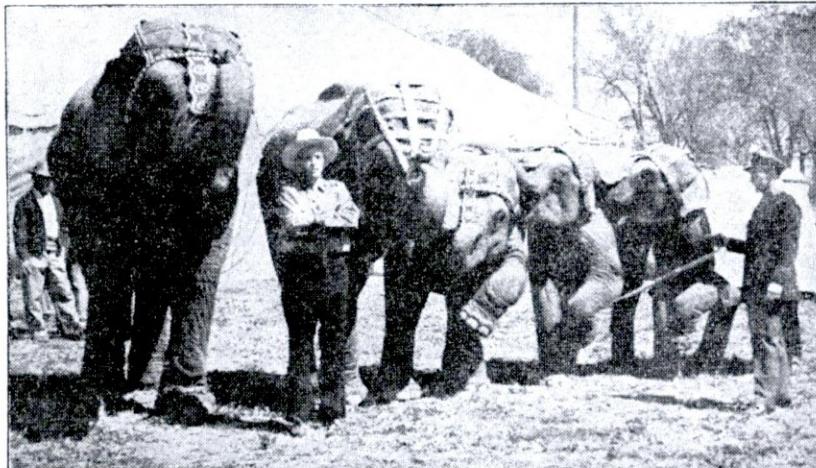
One of the most attractive acts of the show is a herd of eight fire jumping horses. The lead horse will be ridden by Miss Marcella and the other animals will follow through four flaming hoops above hurdles set at the ends of the main tent area.

The side show will be under the management of Ralph Noble. Seven standard acts will be offered and the show will be presented under new canvas.

The concert attraction after the main show will feature a wild west act with a man known as Tiger Bill and a troupe of seven persons.

The general admission prices of 15

Anderson on left and MacDonald on right, with the five elephants on the show in 1939. Photo from *Billboard*.



cents for children and 25 cents for adults probably will be tried in the Kansas towns."

The show opened at Emporia, April 22, but one day only is listed on the route sheet. It traveled on eleven shown owned trucks with two more on the advance.

The Emporia *Gazette* of April 22 published an after notice which read in part: "A

snowy white tent flying the United States flag and yellow, orange and blue banners greeted circus goers Friday afternoon, when almost 2,000 strong, they arrived at the Katy grounds to see the season's premier performance of Bud E. Anderson's Jungle Oddities and three ring circus.

"Friday afternoon's show was the debut of Anderson's three baby elephants, who made their bow for the first time before the public and performed with the ease of old troupers under the direction of Mac MacDonald.

"Thrills galore were in the show. The Silverlake aerialists hung by their teeth in an iron jaw act from a swinging ladder. June Russell, rider in the high school horse act, was jerked from the back of her horse when he swung around to gallop out of the ring. She fell on the small of her back against the hard sharp edge of the center ring. The show went on without a flicker and soon she appeared again in the wild west act.

"In Anderson's elephant-zebra act Topsy, the prancing zebra, and Eva, the juggling elephant, performed. Anderson let Eva, resplendent in green and silver harness and next to the largest of his five elephants, step across his prone body and lower herself until she almost touched him. When he said one word, she arose and, lifting one big hoof at a time, she moved away.

"Fire jumping horses, each free with no rider, dashed around the ring, jumping a hurdle ablaze with fire. The Yoshado band, equilibrists, did a 'tub kick,' sending a heavy red and white tub, almost the size of a farm watering tank, whirling around by the movement of the feet.

"The eight horse liberty act was spectacular. It gets its name from the fact that each horse is free and guided only by the remote control of the trainer, Alabama Campbell, in the center ring.

"Eva, the elephant, played for Topsy, the zebra, who danced in Mr.

Anderson's act. Eva showed she was a bowing champ when she picked up a ball with her trunk and sent it down the alley, knocking down all the pins.

"A side show bally outside started as soon as the last notes of the *Star Spangled Banner* died away within the main tent. Ralph Noble is chief barker. In the side show tent was the fragrant smell of fresh hay which covered the ground. Eva, the four year old snake, charmed by Princess Marquita, who also sold Indian necklaces during the show, was at one side.

"An Australian bushman swallowed fire, and Eva, one of the two elephants, while receiving the salutations of the spectators, coolly untied the chain around her foot and started to walk out. Topsy, the zebra, and the two camels ate the hay on the ground and paid no attention to their admirers, and the lions, the leopard and the two hyena stalked back and forth in their cages with their mouths watering for the two large hunks of meat on a pitchfork which stood against the rail in full view. Two monkeys stared out from a little section of the cage.

"Chief Bowlegs gave a demonstration of knife throwing, using his wife, Princess Marquita, as a subject, and with the greatest of ease let swords slide down his throat up to the hilts.

"The Suez family, Mexican acrobats, booked for the main show, did not arrive in Emporia for either the afternoon or evening show."

In addition to Burlington and Fredonia the show played additional Kansas stands at Chanute, Osawatomie, Ottawa, Council Grove, Hutchinson, Minneapolis, Clay Center, and Washington. It then moved into Nebraska at Fairbury on May 5.

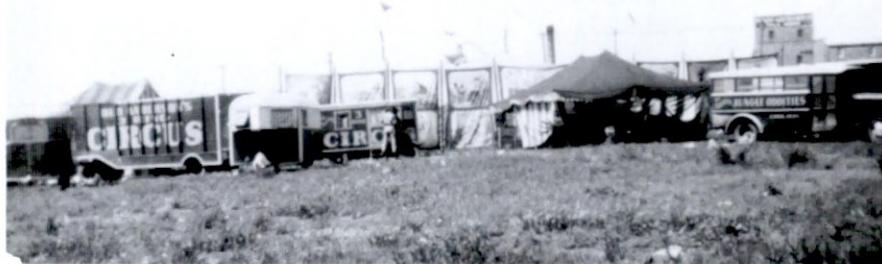
After Mymore and Crete the show moved to Lincoln on May 8. It was noted that this was the earliest date for a circus in Lincoln in many years.

The May 20 *Billboard* carried a review of the show. The piece was headlined: "Anderson has only four Winning Days, moves on 26 units.

'Two weeks and a day old in here (8), a little behind with only four winning dates, the Bud E. Anderson Circus lacked making it, even with the Lincoln stop. It was the first circus to show a loss here in years, but a lot of its bad breaks was due to short billing and a light press.

"Show itself is being stretched into an hour and a half with multiple doubling, with an additional twenty minutes in the concert.

"Grand Entry and the introduction of Anderson swings the show off. Three traps in the three ring (Elizabeth Silverlake, Arthur Henry and Dixie Malbern) are followed by a clown interlude. Then the troupe of 5 elephants, Gentry Babe, Eva, Modoc, Empress and Judy, worked by Mac MacDonald. Juggling by Charles Dryden and a contortionist routine by Monsieur Arthur is the next display. The clowns again, a ladder trio and then the Taketa Japs in a barrel routine.



The Anderson midway in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The bus at right contained the concession department. Pfening Archives.

An iron jaw featuring Johnny Mae Silverlake. The Henrys, globe turn. Eight liberty horses worked by Alabama Campbell. Youshada's perch. The Silverlakes double traps. The menage horses, an elephant and zebra worked by Anderson (this was the former Max Gruber act). A web act (Dell and Babe Basome). Arthur and Mable Henry on the wire; Elso and his trap head balancing bring it up to closing. Finale is a pair of fire jumping horses. Tiger Bill and troupe handle the concert. [Although there was no mention of a lion act in a steel arena one was presented by Capt. Hart.]

The staff includes Anderson, owner, manager; Mrs. Margaret Espy, treasurer; Mrs. B. E. Anderson, secretary; Bert Rickman, equestrian director; Ralph Noble, side show manager; F. L. 'Kokomo' Anders, legal adjuster; John (Shorty) Lynn, superintendent of workingmen; Willie Rawls, tickets; Norman Anderson, concessions; Otis Cobb, steward; Tom Slayton, head waiter; Jack Kofron, band leader; Archie Woods, front door; William Mitchell, master of transportation; George Felix Duvall, general agent; Bernie Head, press.

"Side show personnel, Cuban Mack, impalement; Bamboola (James Young), fire eater; Princess Marquita, snakes; Elizabeth Darling and Margaret Walker, dancers; Margaret Noble, mentalist, with William Dustin and Willie Moon, tickets.

"In the band are Rollie Hyde, drums; Bill Dennis, tuba; R. A. Bunn, bass; Ches-

ter Espy, trombone; Thomas Gardner and Charles Wojesky, trumpets.

"Candy butchers are Whitey and Red Thorne.

"Moved by truck, it takes 26 vehicles for the physical property of the show, not counting the trailers.

"Circus was too small to be playing a town this size. It is designed for spots of 6,000 population or less. Ticket tariff is 35 cents for adults, 25 cents for the youngsters, with an additional two bits for the reserves. Tent seats about 1,600 and drew a 300 house for the matinee and 1,300 at night. Nut is less than \$400 per day and about 100 people are with the show."

Anderson was not pleased with the *Billboard* review and the next issue printed his reply. Headlined: "Anderson denies report about biz. Well pleased."

His letter was printed in full: "I wish to protest against the article your correspondent at Lincoln, Nebraska had in the issue of May 20. A little mental arithmetic will convince you there is something wrong with the picture, as your correspondent's estimate of the show. At 25 and 35 cents it would more than take care of the estimate of the nut, to say nothing of the revenue from reserved seats, concert, side show etc.

"We attribute our rather poor business in Lincoln due to the fact that the people there were very badly disappointed last year with a dog and pony show highly advertised as a circus. The show has been out four weeks now and has never been in the red. We opened in Emporia, Kansas for two days to splendid business and have had only two slightly losing days since, instead of only four winning ones. We have missed no performances and have showed three Sundays. We have missed no pay days, our paper bill is paid up to date and we have not wired home for money.

"So far as our equipment and performance are concerned we have no need to be ashamed of them anywhere. I believe I know a performance as well as your correspondent and am only stating a fact when I say we have a good one, even good enough for Lincoln. We have some good performers, (one among first 25 of favorite outdoor performers in current issue of the *Billboard*), and a very capable man, Mr. Rickman, handling the program. We believe this attack was instigated by a certain show manager.

"We have been readers of *Billboard* for many years. We believe it has been a

great help in our business and have never before had the slightest complaint of unfairness."

In the meantime, after the Lincoln stand, the show played seven more dates in Nebraska, then visited South Dakota for six more. Next began some 52 consecutive stands in Minnesota. The long tour began May 22 at Luverne.

The June 10 *Billboard* said the show had a good Sunday date at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on May 21. It was sponsored by the American Legion and was set up on a downtown lot at Eighth and Franklin Streets. Weather was ideal. Seats were comfortably filled both afternoon and night. The *Argus Leader* gave plenty of publicity. The show moved to Minnesota for two weeks and then back into South Dakota for a few stands. The route was evidently changed as the show remained in Minnesota and did not return to South Dakota until late July. Final notes in the article said that George Felix Duvall, the general agent, made his first visit back to the show since the opening and reported favorable conditions.

News was scarce from the show for the remainder of June, however there was a photo in the June 17 issue of band director Jack Kofron decked out with a western hat and bandana. Kofron also handled the *Billboard* on the show.

After the stand in Austin on July 17 the show moved into Iowa to play Spirit Lake, its only date in that state, but then moved immediately back to Minnesota for two engagements at Redwood Falls and Madison. Four days in South Dakota began July 21 at Milbank. Several stands in North Dakota began at Ellendale on July 27 and the show was in Mayville on the 31st.

The August 5 *Billboard* reported on recent Anderson activities. The article, dated Webster, South Dakota July 29, said that Anderson had ordered two baby elephants from India. They were three feet in height and would make their first appearance in toy stores during the

Jungle Oddities semi-trailer bought from Max Gruber. Pfening Archives.

holiday season. Anderson had handled elephants for many years and these would be the first that he had imported. (Actually four baby elephants had been ordered. One died on ship board and another died later on the show.)

There had been a slight change in the advance. John Foss replaced George Duvall as general agent. Bernie Head continued with the brigade on two trucks and Mrs. Jackie Wilcox continued handling the press chores.

The show had been in five states and covered 3,783 miles and business had been above the average. At Milbank, South Dakota, a full house at matinee and turn-away at night made an excellent stand.

The show was featuring an eight horse liberty and camel acts. Mac MacDonald worked five elephants, assisted by June Russell and Butch Brannon. Anderson presented Eva and Topsy, elephant and zebra purchased from Max Gruber.

The Tex Orton troupe, Alice Tetu, Japanese troupe and the Zorado family joined the performance. Bill Hayes had the menage horses and ponies. Ralph Noble had added a six piece black band and three dancing girls in the side show. Tiger Bill Snyder had the concert and was featured with his horse, Pal. The after show had two cowgirls and four cowboys.

The August route began at Park River, North Dakota which was followed by Grafton. The show returned to Minnesota for two final stands in Warren, 3rd, and Hallock, 4th. Returning to South Dakota at Cavalier ten stands followed in that state. It was then back to South Dakota on August 16 at Eureka, followed by ten more stands. A tour of Nebraska began August 27 at Springview and the final day of the month found the show at Schuyler.

The August 19 *Billboard* reported in headlines: "Capacity night business for Anderson in Minnesota and South Dakota.

"The Bud Anderson Circus had light business but capacity at night in the wheat belt of northern Minnesota and

South Dakota. The show had some opposition from Cole Bros. at Grand Forks, North Dakota.

"Calvin Spikes is now boss canvasman. Johnny Mae Snyder has been added to the concert making a line-up of seven riders."

Coverage of the show continued with the August 26 *Billboard* reporting the Anderson circus was heading back toward Kansas. The show, still featuring its animals and opening spec Noah's Ark was to hit Nebraska the latter part of August.

The September 2 *Billboard* said that the outstanding attendance of the season was at Minnewaukan, North Dakota, a one-show Sunday date where there were 5,286 paid admissions with 3,126 remaining for the concert, according to Leo Snyder. (According to Luke Anderson this was puffed as three shows would have had to be given to seat that number of people.)

Continuing, the article said South Dakota stands were reported holding up well. At Wessington Springs, South Dakota, a merchant tie-up brought capacity business at both afternoon and night performances. June Russell left the show at Eureka. Mazie Floto, formerly of Robbins Bros. Circus, had joined to work elephants and ride in the menage. Charles Dryden was back in the program after being on the sick list. Jack Kofron had added another trumpet to his ten piece band. Johnnie Mae and Leon Snyder were working their comedy rings in the big show. A pair of pandas were to arrive from India with the elephant shipment.

On September 1 World War II began in Europe. This event proved to be financially devastating to many circuses. Cole Bros. management said that although the take had been much better than the year before it dropped off drastically after the war began, so much so that the show closed earlier than planned before the end of the month. Several other shows closed early in October.

The first three days in September found

Anderson horse semi-trailer. Circus World Museum collection.





Anderson still in Nebraska, playing Wilber, Tecumseh, and Rulo. These were followed by only two dates in the home state of Kansas, Holton and Olathe.

Missouri was next on the route for seven stands, beginning with Warrensburg on the 6th and concluding on the 12th at Thayer. Luke Anderson was married in Warrensburg. Four dates in Arkansas followed. The show went back to Missouri for fourteen more. The final stand was at Hayti October 1.

On October 2 the show moved south into Arkansas at Paragould and played twelve consecutive stands. The string was broken when it played a single date in Louisiana at Springhill on October 15. Then it was back to Arkansas for Magnolia, Prescott, and Mashville.

The October 14 *Billboard* reported: "Bud E. Anderson's Circus has added to the original order of animals and according to a cable received last week, the shipment, which will include three baby elephants, one bear, and two pandas will arrive in New York City around December 1. Show now has the same five elephants with which it opened. Anderson says the season as a whole has been excellent. Matinees this fall have been light, but at the night shows people have been on the ground. We will keep the show out as long as we can. Charlie Goss was a recent visitor. Anderson has purchased a new Buick and is considering buying two new semi-trailers and a number of Chevrolet trucks." Goss was a St. Louis Chevrolet dealer who sold trucks to a number of circuses.

The show entered Oklahoma, the final state to be played in 1939, at Broken Bow, October 19, followed by Idabel, and Hugo. A total of 16 stands in the state were played, the final coming at Picher on November 5, where the season closed. The show arrived in Emporia on November 7. The total mileage for the year was 8,510. The show played 187 towns, in 10 states, giving 374 performances. The longest jump was 126 miles from Austin, Minnesota to Spirit Lake, Iowa.

Bud Anderson spinning a rope with the liberty horse act in background in 1939. Luke Anderson collection.

The November 6 Emporia *Gazette* told of the show's return home: "Bud Anderson's Circus, after a profitable season, is home. Sixteen trucks and about 30 employes pulled in at the show's winter quarters Sunday night after closing the season in Oklahoma.

"The Emporia circus not only was profitable, but also traveled over 8,000 miles since April 18, with no wrecks, no mishaps and no tent blowdowns.

"We were rained out only once during the season," Anderson said. "That occurred at Jackson, Minnesota, in June, when a heavy rain prevented two performances. The show suffered no windstorm damage. Flat tires or blowouts were the only troubles the trucks had on the road."

"While we had an excellent season, it was not as good as those of 1934 or 1935," the Emporia circus man said.

"In addition to the usual run of luck, Anderson said the show experienced little internal troubles during the season.

"We had one fight and one arrest among the employes," Anderson said. "Those troubles came at the end of the season."

"Anderson explained that two ticket men had a fight Saturday night and that on the way to Emporia. Sunday night the driver of the big elephant truck, after traveling 8,500 miles, was arrested by State Highway patrolmen in Coffey county for not having a driver's license.

"Anderson has been notified by an Indian animal dealer that four baby elephants, two pandas, two pythons and a Malayan sun bear have been shipped from Rangoon, Burma. Anderson's new animals are scheduled to arrive in New York between December 1 and 15."

As was customary the *Billboard* reviewed the circus season just concluded in the December 30 issue. Overall it was another below par season for most shows. It reported that Anderson's did fair busi-

ness. Two of the largest motorized circuses, Downie Bros. and Parker & Watts both completed their seasons but never again appeared on the road, their equipment and animals scattered.

Anderson's show returned to the Emporia quarters where preparations soon began for the 1940 season. The same issue had this interesting article: "Bud Anderson to change 1940 presentation. stock increased.

"Bud E. Anderson's Jungle Oddities & 3 Ring Circus which closed a successful 28 week season at Pitcher, Oklahoma, November 5 will be on tour next year with the same title but with a radically new technique in presenting the program according to Anderson. The 1940 styling calls for a large increase in stock. Four camels were purchased from the Albuquerque, New Mexico zoo early this month, increasing the camel herd to eight. Twelve horses will arrive from Texas soon after Christmas. The shipment of wild animals Anderson ordered direct from India last spring is due to arrive in New York City on January 3. It includes four baby elephants which will raise bull herd to nine, and two pandas. Shipment was originally scheduled to dock in America on December 1 but the war delayed it. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson will leave Emporia for New York on Christmas Day to supervise transportation of the animals to winter quarters here. Bert Rickman, equestrian director, will accompany the Andersons and while in the East will select the wardrobe for the closing spec for next season's show. Rickman stated that an order for a Wurlitzer Novachord would be placed in Chicago on the return trip.

"Building program at quarters is far ahead of schedule due to spring like weather that has prevailed the past few weeks. New equipment completed recently includes an office wagon. A new bull truck arrived from the Eli Bridge Company. Training in the elephant and horse departments will not begin until after January 1, Rickman stated.

"The show has two Christmas parade units on the road under contract to Thatcher-Stanberry department store of Fort Dodge, Iowa. Mac MacDonald is in charge of the No. 1 unit and Matt Laurish, No. 2.

With this report the 1939 circus year soon passed into history. It is the intention of the author to complete the 1940 and 1941 Bud Anderson story, although not immediately.

Thanks to the Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas; Luke Anderson; Fred Pfening, Jr. and Fred Dahlinger, Jr. of the Circus World Museum for their help in preparation of this article.

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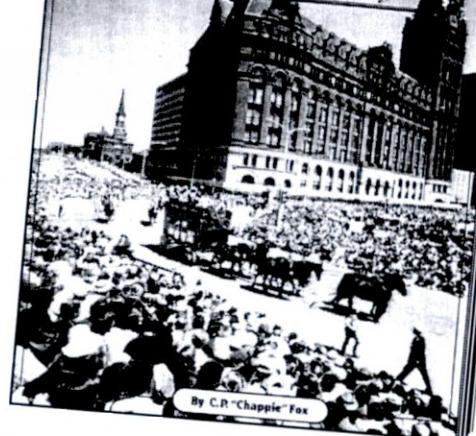
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In 1943, in the middle of World War II, two new circuses appeared in New York City. Both were non-traditional. One was in a tent and the other in a building. One was produced by Ringling Bros., the other by Larry Sunbrock, a well known, noisy ball park showman.

Sunbrock's Big Top Circus appeared under canvas. The other show, lasting the longest, was Spangles, the Continental Circus, presented in Madison Square Garden.

Larry "Never a Dull Moment" Sunbrock began his career at age

23 as an assistant manager of a small theater in Cincinnati, Ohio. According to a biography published in the 1943 Big Top program he later owned eight suburban movie houses in the Queen City. These were sold in 1929 for \$50,000. He promptly lost it all in the Wall Street crash.

Returning to show business in 1930 he began staging radio jamborees and barn dances. Profits from these promotions were used to buy two theaters in Cincinnati which were later sold to RKO. He then staged theatrical productions in Southern California. He claimed that his "Jitterbug Jamboree" played for two months at the Hollywood Legion Stadium. After attending a very successful California State Championship Rodeo in Salinas, Sunbrock saw great potential in staging rodeos in large city stadiums and ball parks. In 1939 he leased the 105,000 seat Los Angeles Coliseum and sold 94,000 paid admissions. Adding auto thrill show and circus acts to the cowboys he began promoting his Circle A Rodeo and Hollywood Thrill show across the country.

In 1942 he produced a combination circus and thrill show in the Polo Grounds in New York City. A sixty-two event show was advertised. About twenty-five appeared. He ran into financial problems and Tom Packs took over and provided money for pressing claims.

In 1943 Sunbrock was ready to again invade Gotham. In early spring he announced he would buck the Ringling show. In January 1943 he and his staff opened an office in New York and began making arrangements to present a tented circus in mid-town Manhattan.

The Sunbrock Big Top Circus was to open April 2, but did not start until much later.

The Greatest Show on Earth was playing its annual Madison Square Garden date from April 9 to May 16 which was very successful. This was

# MANHATTAN'S SUMMER CIRCUS BATTLE

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

the first season under the control of Robert Ringling and his family.

The Garden did not take lightly to another circus day and dating the Ringling show. Garden personnel evidently first suggested a circus to play there all summer. They approached the Ringling management while the big show was there. They promised to install a new air conditioning system to provide comfort during the hot weather sawdust presentation. An agreement with Ringling was made to produce a different kind of circus.

The first official word of the Sunbrock show appeared in the March 13 *Billboard*: "The Ringling circus never recognized any local opposition during its Garden engagement, which this year is for about 38 days, opening April 9. Judged by the box office over the years, there's no competition worth mentioning. Even when Cole Bros. Circus day and dated the big top at the Hippodrome half a dozen seasons ago, RB did better than fair at the

Larry Sunbrock, producer of the New York City Big Top Circus. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



Garden. Moreover, the show will move into the Eighth Avenue arena next month backed by a steady stream of national publicity with free ducats for purchasers of War Bonds.

"But there's one showman around who thrives on accomplishing miracles, and, incidentally, he has pulled a few in recent years, although a trail of criticism has been left behind in many instances. Beating a few other promoters and showmen to the punch, all of them practically in on the ground floor since last September, long before the miracle puller ever thought of the site, Larry Sunbrock, better known as the "Never a Dull Moment" redhead, has tied up the much sought-after parking lot which backs up against the Roxy Theater, with entrances on 61st and 52nd Streets, on top of crowded Radio City, and for years one of the busiest show streets on the Broadway beat.

"Sunbrock hit town a few weeks ago intent on kicking over the lease when it seemed on the verge or going to others including showman Harry Saltzman, original thinker-upper of the circus deal for Times Square consummation, and, more recently, the William Morris office. In spite of the fact that Sunbrock pulled off a thrill show at the Polo Grounds last July with a mass accident to customers on the third day out due to a crash car hurdling a front box, Sunbrock swung the lease. The opposition also put in its licks about Sunbrock's background with combination thrill-circus rodeo shows throughout the country, but it was no go, because Sunbrock has the contract in his pocket-signed, sealed and delivered within the week and calling for a \$50,000 binder with the Fox interests, represented by Mrs. William (Eva) Fox and Ted Altman.

"The company formed is Big Top, Inc., dedicated to the idea of producing a circus under canvas or otherwise, with officers listed being: Sunbrock, president; Dave Lodge, a Philadelphia outdoor advertising man, vice-president and Phil Geldzahier, Sunbrock's local attorney, secretary and treasurer. Lease is for one year, and a 300 by 150 big top will be erected with a seating capacity of about 7,000. Twice daily affair with a scale or 55 cents to \$1.60, semipermanent equipment, and show known as the Great Sunbrock Circus. Four shows daily on Saturday and Sunday, but Sunbrock is mum on starting date, which he says will be 'sometime after April 1.'

"It will be in three rings, with per-

formances at 2:30 and 8:30 during the week and at noon, 3, 7 and 11 on weekends. Stretch is for about 30 weeks, following which the Sunbrock mind visualizes the erection of a large portable ice rink to run until the next circus season.

"Associated with Peck's Bad Boy in the venture, aside from the officers, is Sunbrock's lieutenant, Jack Andrews, who for two years has been malter d'concessions and general buffer-liaison for his youthful mentor.

"Late this week Sunbrock and Andrews made known that they had sold the concessions rights for \$15,000 against a 25% guarantee to Jack Berinson, big shot Philadelphia concessionaire, backer and occasional show syndicate chief, who has headed many a venture in show business on the financial side. There will also be a side show on the grand variety, but this section of operations has not yet been let. Sunbrock signed the lease with Consolidated Biological Products, Inc.

"At present the Great Larry is in the mldst of a hillbilly barnstorming tour of stands on a Sunday basis. Tomorrow its Fort Wayne, Indiana; the 14th, Toledo, Ohio; 21st, Springfield, Ohio and the 28th, Indianapolis."

Further news of the new show appeared in the May 1 *Billboard*: "In mid-June, about a month after the Ringling circus exits from Madison Square Garden, a production-type-ring show will be presented in that arena, under the banner of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, according to one source who is in on the ground floor. Neither the circus management nor the Garden would make any comment on the report, but it can be stated definitely that a circus is in the works and that it will run 'indefinitely.'

The Garden first broached the idea to the Big Show. How to keep the building active during the warm weather has always been a problem which has never been solved, although the place has had some hot-weather attractions in the past, none of them were successful. Ringling management never figured to be directly interested in pushing such a proposal because, for one thing, it is getting nothing but money at its current 37-day stand.

"Secondly, it has always shied away from outside operations. Under the arrangement described by the informant, the circus will supply and produce the show and the Garden will furnish the house the staff and most of the routine facilities. RB will promote, exploit and manage the show. There will probably be a tie-up with the Treasury Department on the sale of War Bonds, similar to that which prevailed at the circus opening April 9, when every seat had a bond pur-

chaser, with blocks of a few hundred bond tickets at subsequent performances.

"Acts are being sought already and the Kimris, featured aerial revolve novelty now in the program, is a definite booking,

the show. Pressure on Brooks and the union allowed delivery on time.

Meanwhile Sunbrock was running into all kinds of bureaucratic problems in getting his show open. AGVA forced him to make a \$30,000 deposit because of his history of stiffing acts. They also would not agree to the scheduled number of performances each week. He booked the Powers elephants and Proske's tigers and then could not get clearance to bring them into New York City. The May 22 *Billboard* published this tongue-in-cheek report: "Larry Sunbrock made a birdie on the 8th hole. The showman-promoter, rebuffed seven times by the Board of Standards and Appeals in his efforts to open the Big Top Circus back of the Roxy Theater, drew the long-looked-for nod from the board on May 11 on his eighth appearance before the tough body and went ahead with plans to tee off on May 28.

"The board had made Sunbrock dizzy on consecutive Tuesdays, the day for hearings, getting the promoter to scout the country for flameproof and waterproof canvas. On Tuesday he apparently established his right to go ahead and made an enthusiastic announcement to the *Billboard* about the 28th opener.

"The difficulties experienced by Sunbrock up to that point formed the subject for a four-page communiqué to the press in which he charted the history of his headaches. The details are too gruesome and technical to interest the trade at large—some of them were related in previous stories on the subject anyway. The redhead had visions of getting under way in mid-April, right smack during the Ringling run which ends today (15), but fate decreed otherwise, altho the Great Larry is said to have been extremely anxious to buck the Big Bertha on Broadway just for the fun of it. (He is reported on impeccable authority to be that kind of gent.)

"In a quiz of the whiz it developed that he had all but earned big paper profits on wagers from local and around-country knockers who said he never would get open. And if he does finally get started, it will have been against some strong opposition including the Roxy Theater, Radio City interests, the Sixth Avenue Business Men's Association, the Taft and Abbey hotels and numerous others—large, small and medium-sized.

"Sunbrock had received every permit necessary, but getting past the august Board of Standards, which is the supreme local authority on erection-structural conformance, had 'Peck's Bad Boy,' stymied.

"Observers don't credit even Sunbrock with being able to open so soon after getting the okay, but he says hell do it,—and it is said to be dangerous to disbelieve a

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**A MILLION DOLLAR PROPOSITION**

LARRY SUNBROCK and JACK ANDREWS  
at Hotel Astor, N. Y., Permanently

Sunbrock published this ad in the March 13, 1943 *Billboard*.

as it is free after the Boston engagement, which is for two weeks ending May 29. No other acts presently with the Big Show performance will be used, however.

"Garden and Ringling figure on a top of \$2.20, but scale may be upped slightly on week-ends. Probably four matinees a week and seven night shows, totaling eleven performances."

The show was titled Spangles, the Continental Circus, presented by Ringling Bros. Charles Sparks was brought out of semi-retirement in Macon, Georgia, and named general manager. The show was to open in the Garden for a run beginning June 10. The opening was to be a War Bond set-up, with the house set aside for purchasers of from \$25 to \$2,000 denominations. The circus was to be presented in a European one ring format, plus a stage.

Ringling invested over \$70,000 in production and rehearsal expenses for Spangles. The stage, scenery and costumes cost over \$50,000.

As the opening date approached the Spangles management found out that there was some sort of controversy between the Brooks Costume Company and the theatrical costume workers union that could delay production of costumes for

man with so many miracles in his wide repertoire."

The *New York News* published this on June 9: "The first of mid-Manhattan's two summer circuses opens tonight in the former parking lot behind the Roxy. The second, the Ringlings' one-ring 'Spangles,' comes to life a week from tonight, two blocks away in Madison Square Garden. Their relative merit is still uncertain but the history of the first is probably the more interesting.

"This 'Big-Top Circus' is a tent show, but not the kind Larry Sunbrock, its producer, had planned. A barnstorming promoter who has had a lot of odd enterprises in California, Sunbrock decided last winter to do a tent show here. All he meant by that was clearing some space in mid-town, setting out some chairs and throwing some canvas over the thing.

"He was mildly pained, however to learn that New York has a number of stringent fire laws and as spring played itself out, he discovered that his tent show was acquiring an air of permanence and that he was becoming Sunbrock, the producer.

"Last week, therefore, the producer stood out in the blazing noonday sunlight watching the completion of a six-feet-high wall of concrete blocks, divided at regular intervals by upright steel I-beams to serve as stanchions for the tent covering. Cement ramps were being poured and smoothed to hold the seats. About 75 laborers were darting around doing various jobs.

"The producer had also acquired two Broadway press agents, so dazed by their changed habitat and the hot sun that they had become inhibited and could only make mild statements like, 'He's another Billy Rose!' and 'He's another Mike Todd!'

"Sunbrock turned out to be a very youthful-faced man of 39 who could be taken for 25. He looked as though he would fit very nicely behind a teller's window in a small town bank or behind a grocery counter. He kept looking that way until he got on the subject of one of his fantastic California promotions. Then, he would break out with 'I murdered 'em,' and you could see why he wouldn't do so well in a bank.

"In 1937, he gave up his 'country fiddler' contests to stage a 'Jitterbug Wedding,' in which a couple got married in swing-time, in Los Angeles. He married off quite a few couples and drew huge crowds until a rival arena paid him to leave. He also had great success with a big fish pond in which the fish had numbers up to 100 and people stood around and cast, to be paid off according to their numerical hauls. The \$100 fish was a barracuda which just couldn't be caught and

used to snarl all the lines and gobble up the perch.

"Doing this sort of thing over a number of years, Sunbrock says he amassed about \$50,000 and then decided upon this New York circus. With all the unexpected fire

low ('very temperamental,' says Sunbrock) who was very pleased to discover that the enterprise was real. His first assurance had come when he had got off the train from Chicago and heard someone talking about 'the new circus.'"

The program listed this extensive performance:

1. Cowboy song by Lloyd Copas.
2. Music by the Big Top Circus band.
3. Clowns.
4. Marches by our band.
5. Bobo Barnett his dogs.
6. God Bless America, sung by Marion Eddy, Flag bearer Jim Conley.
7. Our National Anthem, sung by Marion Eddy.
8. Quadrille on horseback.
9. Clowns, "call the doctor."
10. Sunbrockettes in Brazilian Fiesta.
11. Gregoresko, the man who hangs himself and lives to tell the tale.
12. Wilbur's ponies and dogs; Fred's world famous football dogs; Conley's dogs and ponies.
13. Clowns in the firecracker.
14. Four Sidneys, whirlwinds on the bicycle.
15. Captain Marsman and his high school horse.
16. Walter Guice on the horizontal bars.
17. Lucy Gillette, phenomenal tricks on the trapeze.
18. Blue Devils, whirlwind tumblers.
19. Clown band.
20. Sunbrockettes in Gay Nineties.
21. La Tosca, Wizard of the bounding rope.
22. Trampoline.
23. Will Hill elephants.
24. Great Cahill.
25. Jinx Hoagland, horses.
26. Ullaine Mallot.
27. Sunbrockettes in African Jungle Number featuring Princess Vanessa.
28. Proske Tigers.
29. Clowns.
30. Janet May.
31. Canistrellis on unsupported ladders.
32. Orantos.
33. Shorty Sutton and Betty Lee, whip crackers.
34. Powers Elephants.
35. Mickey King, aerialist.
36. Myrtle Dunedin (cyclist). Three Flames, roller skating; Rubernig, juggler.
37. Eight Arabians in fast tumbling.
38. Con Colleano, world's greatest wire act.
39. Peanuts, the educated horse.
40. Jack Holst, former Olympian champion on the horizontal bars.
41. Conley riding act.
42. Jumbo, the seal with human intelligence.
43. Yocobis, tetterboard act.

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WITH  
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★ MISS VICTORY - SHOT 200 FEET OUT OF A CANNON  
★ CON COLLEANO! THE WIZARD OF THE WIRE  
★ THE WORLD FAMOUS POWERS ELEPHANTS  
★ GREGORESKO! THE MAN WHO HANGS HIMSELF  
★ CAPTAIN PROSKES WILD LIONS & TIGERS  
★ 24-GORGEOUS DANCING GIRLS-24  
★ THE SENSATIONAL YACOBIS  
★ THE THRILLING BEROSKIS  
★ CLOWNS-BOXING KANGAROOS  
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**52-TITANIC EVENTS-52**

**OPENS WED. 8:30 P.M. VIEW**  
**THEN DAILY AT 2:30 & 8:30 P.M.**

Sunbrock newspaper ad used in advance of the opening.

laws he has had to raise much more than that.

"A windfall was the discovery of some old car tracks on the 50th Street lot, which used to be a car barn. He had some of this track dug up and traded the steel for his needed I-beams.

"I couldn't get a priority," he said, "so I got an allocation."

"Yesterday afternoon, the structure was almost finished. The elephants were patiently waiting in nearby garages until their stalls on the lot would be ready for occupancy. A couple of the clowns arrived, one of them, Bobo Barrnet, a big fel-



- 44. Chick Sale, horse.
- 45. Clowns.
- 46. Jumping horses.
- 47. Clowns.
- 48. Flying Behees.
- 49. Sunbrockettes in military number.
- 50. Parade of nations.
- 51. Eggle Zaccini, cannon act.
- 52. Grand Finale.

This listing was typical of the half a hundred numbers in former Sunbrock rodeo and thrill shows. As had often been the case in former shows a large number of the acts did not appear.

The Garden published a twenty-eight page program for the Spangles show. The performance listing was:

Display No. 1 The most treacherous and ferocious wild animals ever assembled, educated beyond belief by Alfred Court, master trainer of the ages. Magnificent mixed group of Abyssinian Lions, polar bears, Kodiak bears and Berber lions, together with Great Dane dogs, presented by Joseph Walsh.

Display No. 2 Incredibly daring and dangerous achievements on lofty ladders in the Garden's dome by the Parroffs.

Display No. 3 Clowns.

Display No. 4 Comedians of the flying trapeze in exciting new feats. The Lopez Trio.

Display No. 5 Clowns.

Display No. 6 Bicycling bruins and bewitching Bruin-ettes. Pallenberg's Wonder Bears. Skating, skylarking shaggy wags from forest depths, and beautiful bear-headed ballerinas in captivating contrast.

Display No. 7 An exceptional equestrian offering by Dr. Herman Ostermaier, master of dressage.

Display No. 8 Sensational high aerial feats by a world famous artist. Elly Ardely. The Russian bird of paradise.

Display No. 9 The banana man himself. Pre-eminent star of Continental circuses

Sunbrock's Big Top Circus entrance and big top.

and musical hall fame. The inimitable A. Robbins. The walking victory garden, artfully assisted by seductive Spangelettes.

#### Intermission

Display No. 10 Herd of peerless performing pachyderms in new routines and maneuvers. The Spangles elephants, trained by James Reynolds and presented by Andrea Gallagher.

Display No. 11 Beautiful and talented trio of acrobatic artists in astounding accomplishments. Novak Sisters.

Display No. 12 A remarkable example of patient schooling and training. Capt. Roland Tiebor and his educated sea lions.

Display No. 13 Reaching a new high in equilibrium aerial perch artists without parallel. The Walkmirs.

Display No. 14 A rhapsody in white. Dr. Ostermaier and Doheos, the white wingless pegasus. An equine classic enhanced by nymphs of rare beauty and charm.

Display No. 15 Trampoline marvels in an amazing exhibition of split second precision. Adriana and Charly.

Display No. 16 The topmost sensation in amusement annals. Centrifugal force defied at dizzy heights by the Kimris.

Display No. 17 A star-spangled salute to unity, victory and freedom. The Spangles grand finale.

The June 26 *Billboard* provided this report on the two New York shows: "The battle of circuses has begun. Spangles, presented by Ringling Bros. at the Garden got under way as scheduled on June 7. Larry Sunbrock's Big Top Circus, harassed in its start by just about everything in the book, decided to tee off on June 8 in a driving rain and drew less than 1,000 people, including paper, on the former parking lot back of the Roxy theater.

"While the Ringling show was in the Garden, Robert Ringling and the arena

management got together on the Continental-style show, preparing it in about four weeks right after the Big Show exited May 15. Meantime Sunbrock's biggest hitch was getting severe restrictions of the Board of Standards and Appeals, being tossed about between the building department and license commission, not to mention other bureaus. As a result, he had to be content with making his Gotham debut behind the Garden adventure. As the Sunbrock layout unfolded it was not quite ready, with down pours adding to his tribulations, among which were leaks all around the so-called flame-proof and water-proof canvas and okayed by such by the Board of Standards.

"For the Spangles opening the capacity was about 9,000 to accommodate the bond payers. After the pre-lim the balcony was shelved down to about 6,000. About half of the Garden is used, the split being almost in the middle and a big stage and elevated bandstand behind it spotted from the 49th to 50th Street side. The track is at both ends, however, to permit entry and exit of performers and animals. A big ring fronts the stage.

"Even in its raw form at opening, it is a circus full of good show with top talent and, for contrast, Broadway stamped the production and flourishes in between 'good and no good corn.' But with all it was well received. Robert Ringling and his associates have called in several troupes and acts from the Big Show, including Alfred Court's animals with Joseph Walsh in the cage and Court supervising on the outside. Also a few acts attached to RB in past seasons, Pallenberg's bears, Roland Tiebor seals; Walkmirs, perch act and Adriana and Charly, trampoline. Not a dud in the whole layout of Ringling and ex-Ringling turns.

"The contingent of clowns with two billed numbers and a flock of walk-arounds, stops and wait fillers. Nothing exceptional in this department but some of them talk, which is supposed to justify the Continental end somewhat. The programmed numbers are good, however.

"Seventeen displays close with the Spangles grand finale which is a repeat, with slight alterations, of the Big Show's Pan-American finale of a couple of seasons ago. Here 16 girls climb rope ladders suspended from a bar and when they reach the top their long trains are unfurled to produce the stars and stripes. Plenty effective. It's billed as a star-spangled salute to unity, victory and freedom and it's terrific salesmanship.

"On the production side there's a big handful of 'theater,' including Spangles girl, Irma Carter, one of those liquid torsoed gals functioning as mistress of ceremonials and accompanied by a retinue



The Spangles stage and bandstand in Madison Square Garden.

of eight girls. Bad voice, however, and she drew a few sneers from the balcony cynics due to the fact that she walked lazily around the stage a la model before spilling on the mike and sometimes the music drowned out her announcements. Later in the show she was ordered down to an abbreviated promenade and did better. Three changes of costume, winding up with spangled briefs. In addition to her ladies in waiting there's a line of sixteen. Their first big number is a bear terp precede to Pallenberg's bears in which they appear on stage as Bruin-ettes. When the McCoy bears come on the girls take to the ring curb where they plant themselves as onlookers. Eight of them escort Ostermaier's first horse number in seductive red and white garb and feathered hats. For the Robins turn twelve Spanglelettes are on with get-ups simulating bananas, complete even unto muffs which look like banana hands.

"For Ostermaier's top number with steed Doheos there's a 24-girl toeless ballet, a spotlight offering ably executed.

"The show started at 8:40 and finished at 11:25. Performances nightly except Monday with matinees Tuesday, Thursday and week-ends, but there will be two performances July 5. scale is high—\$1.10 to \$2.75, but up to \$3.30 Saturday nights and July 4. Half rates for kids under 12 on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. For a summer run, which Ringling and the Garden figure to go minimum ten weeks, a 50-cent low appear to be called for, there being plenty of capacity which is built up even further via chairs in the arena. Garden was cool at opening, but it was a cool night. Real hot weather may tell a different story.

"The staging is by Lauretta Jefferson of Broadway and Big Show (1943) note. She's represented in the town's newest musical hit, *Early to Bed*. Costumes designed and supervised by Billy Livingston, with decor and props by A. A. Os-

trander. Henry Kyes is the musical director and Bert Knapp did the score. General manager is the veteran Charles Sparks, of Downie Bros. and Sparks Circus fame. Hal Olver and Don McCloud are the press agents, with radio handled by Don Lang. Phil Fein is equestrian director and Doug Morris assistant to Ostrander. Mickey Graves, veteran ex-Ringlingite, is boss of props."

In the same issue of *Billboard* Leonard Traube commented on the Sunbrock opera: "Sunbrock made it tough sledding for reviewers, not to mention the public, by opening suddenly, albeit weeks tardy, without informing the working press. It was really a dress rehearsal. In fact, he said as much in an announcement to the paying audience, which in itself is something new in circus candor. Funny at that, because for a week his newspaper ads had the now in them without any motion by Sunbrock to alter the misinformation. Spot announcements via radio, ditto. When he did get off, what with the rain, less than a third of his approximate capacity was on hand.

"Under the circumstances and in all fairness, an official review and sizing-up of the show would be clearly out of bounds, not to mention that it is almost impossible, but some of the gory details might be worthwhile offering. Its billed three rings, but there's only a big stage and two rings improvised with canvas, portable honky-tonk style. A four-pole top, rising about 45 feet, which is a pretty low top, measures approximately 120 by 230. Lacking rib ropes, it's weighted with cable. They made Sunbrock build concrete blocks all around, plus concrete walks, permanent dressing rooms, up-to-the-minute plumbing, etc. He is not finished yet, but enough to get started any-

way. He put in regular all-wood seats, which are permanently fixed, and the rise is only about three feet at the sidewalls, so that customers in the back can't see much. Grandstand style would have been the thing but the city wouldn't go for that. License commission nixed his animal acts, including Powers elephants and Prosek's tigers, but Sunbrock expects to get them reinstated.

"With Frank Small's 24-girl line (he calls em Sunbrockettes), Sunbrock has the program up to 52 numbers, an old habit of his. He does it by counting everything, including a yawn. Billed and unbilled combination circus-nitery-vaude show has some of the best and best known acts in the business: Con Colleano; Winnie Colleano; Lucie Gillette; the Yacopis; Gregoresko; Four Sidneys; La Tosca, Canestrelli troupe; Janet May; Ullaine Malloy; Jack Holst. Zacchini cannon (Eglie Zacchini is Miss Victory in the finale), Wilbur's dogs and ponies, and Fred's Football Dogs. There were lots more but some of them checked out, including Will Hill's elephants and ponies and aerialist Mickey King, but Hill is expected back.

"Official program has everyone in, including some who never even got here. Show runs on forever helter-skelter, with little or no direction. Sunbrock himself is at the mike in front of Jimmy Victor's 14-piece band

"Listed as officers are Sunbrock, president: Marion Sunbrock, vice-president; Lloyd Copas, treasurer, and Dave Lodge, secretary. The financing is supposed to be from half a dozen sources. Jack Andrews is assistant general director, Sunbrock being chief of that department. Julius Kuehnel is on the general staff. Costumes by Dorothy Whitney. Press agents are Broadway's George B. Evans and Sunbrock's stand-by, George Alabama Florida. John C. Jackel is booking rep and Jimmy Picahiani, stage manager."

The *New York Mirror* published this review of the Sunbrock show on June 20: "Larry Sunbrock has a lot of moxie. Facing innumerable handicaps, he brought a tent circus to the former parking lot back of the Roxy Theater last night that's a corker. Titled 'The Big Top,' it offers a feast of thrill and skill.

"The second act is a lulu, featuring some of the most sensational performers to headline a tanbark show in years. Eglie Zacchini, her brother gone to war, is shot from the Zacchini family's famous cannon 200 feet through the air into a landing net. Our records fail to reveal whether she's the only woman ever to perform the feat, but it is a cinch she's the prettiest.

"Another terrific number is La Tosca, a beautiful and graceful girl who does a dance on the slack rope that most gals

couldn't do on a floor. And for a topper, she does a double back somersault

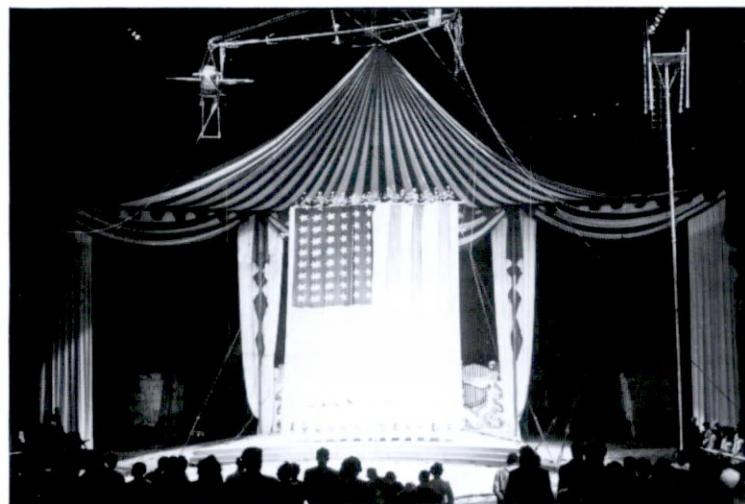
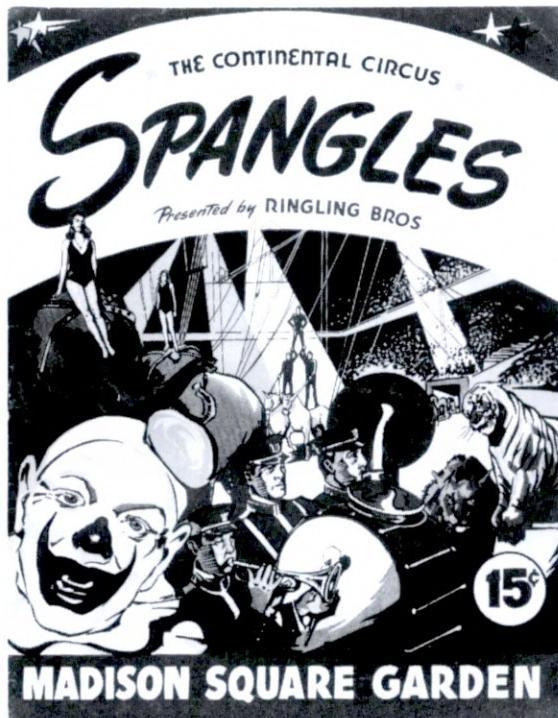
"Janet May, Winnie Colleano and Lucy Gillette team in one of the most exciting aerial specs seen hereabouts in half a dozen semesters. Miss May did 101 roll-ups and finished as fresh as a daisy. Miss Colleano swung through the air, hanging by her dainty heels from a trapeze. Miss Gillette did a trick fall that's a honey.

The Yacobis present tetterboard routines that are phenomenal. Jack Holst, assisted by his attractive wife, demonstrates the wizardry on the horizontal bars that won him an Olympic championship.

"Other outstanding acts on the bill are Con Colleano, king of slack wire workers; the Canestrellis on unsupported ladders; Gregoresko, who hangs himself; Capt. Marsman's and Tex Smith's educated horses; Ullaine Malloy, aerialist.

"Also Capt. Beatty's wonder bears; The Four Sidneys, bicycle whirlwinds; Fred's amusing loot ball dogs; The Three Flames, dizzlers on skates; Shorty Sutton and Betty Lee, amazing whip crackers. Bobo Barnett and Joe Ambrose head a brigade of funny clowns. The Sunbrockettes step with precision and soothe the eyes. Arabian tumblers somersault through the arena. Myrtle Dunedin synchronizes juggling and unicycling.

Cover of the 1943 Spangles program.



The finale of the Spangles performance.

"Jimmy Victor and his big top band featuring vocalist Marion Eddy merit salutes.

"Sunrock's Big Top Circus, in sum, is big time. It packs a lot of laughs, spine tingles and nostalgia into three hours. Every New York big shot who came from a small town, should get a kick out of seeing a circus, with peanuts and popcorn, again under a real tent. And it should prove a novelty for natives who haven't gandered a show under canvas."

Although not on hand when the show opened Roman Proske's tiger act joined the Sunrock show a few days later.

Robert Coleman wrote this review of the Garden show in the *New York Mirror* after the opening: "Spangles." Continental Circus which the Ringling Brothers brought to Madison Square Garden yesterday, is a glittering gem. Beautiful settings, lovely costumes, thrilling acts, amusing comedy and dozens of pretty girls make it a wonderful eye tonic.

"Impresario Robert Ringling has trans-formed the Garden. It breathes circus from the moment you enter the doors. The lobby has been decorated in a big-top motif. A huge stage has been installed in the west end of the arena.

"The stage is backed by the largest cyclorama in the world, sky-blue, studded with myriads of silver stars and topped by patriotic bunting. Over it is a white and gold bandstand, adorned with cal-lope pipes, and to each side a gay circus wagon.

"In front is a 52 foot ring--the customary ring is 42 feet in diameter--surrounded by green

tanbark and summery banks of flowers.

"The seating capacity is limited to 5,200, with perfect vision from every chair. Since the action is all concentrated on a single stage and in the single ring, it's impossible to miss a thing.

"The acts are announced by Irma Carter, 'Mistress of Pantomime and Spirit of Spangles,' and preceded on stage by bevy of Laurretta Jefferson dancers. Miss Carter is a tall, blond orb-popper and the Jefferson girls should have the stage-door Johns blocking

the Garden exits.

"Joseph Walsh puts Alfred Court's mixed group of Abyssinian and Berber lions, polar and Kodiak bears and Great Dane dogs through breath-taking stunts.

"The marvelous Kimris fly around the arena's rafters, hanging by their toes from trapezes propelled by a midget airplane. The Parroffs perform spine-tingling maneuvers on ladders atop a high pole.

"Elly Ardely, 'Spangles' fashion plate and queen of aerialists, grabs handkerchiefs with her teeth and stands on her dainty head while swinging through the air on a shiny trapeze.

"Dr. Ostermaier's snowy-white horse, 'Doheos,' waltzes with the precision of a ballroom star.

"A. Robins, musical clown, produces bunches of bananas, half a dozen watermelons, racks of neckties, violins and music stands from a capacious coat. And the Ringling 'Joeys' offer new comedy novelties. A prancing cat that springs into the audience should delight the children.

"The Novak Sisters, comely acrobats; the Lopez Trio, comedy gymnasts; the Walkmirs, perch wizards; Adriana and Charly trampoline artists; Roland Tiebor's seals and Pallenberg's bears are other applause winners on the bill.

"James Reynolds and Andrea Gallagher present five elephants heroes and heroines of last year's Cleveland menagerie fire. Reynolds had nursed back to health his performing pachyderms, seared ears being their only souvenirs of the flaming ordeal.

"Spangles, in sum, is a dazzling show. Opulent, spectacular tasteful, packed with laughs and excitement, it should jam the Garden for months. Put it on your must-see list immediately. It's great entertainment."

John F. Reddy, Ringling's general counsel in the show's Rockefeller Plaza office, wrote to Robert Ringling in Hartford, Connecticut on July 23 about efforts being

made to improve Spangles ticket sales. He advised that arrangements had been made with all of the major ticket agencies to allow additional commissions on all tickets sold. Instead of using cut rate ticket agencies two men were hired to arrange for the sale of large group theater parties. The new arrangement was made after a conference with Charles Sparks, Hal Olver and Reddy. Reddy also advised Ringling that he had contacted George Hamid about troupers Spangles in cities not played by the Hamid-Morton show. He added that the show played to 3,000 on July 22.

In July Harry and May Kovar replaced Joseph Walsh to work the Court wild animal act. The Cristianis, who has closed with a Broadway show, joined the Spangles performance. Their contract covered the period from July 5 to August 1 at \$1,200 per week.

Sunrock's luck finally gave out when no one came to see his show. On June 18 his operation was placed in bankruptcy in the U. S. District Court. Big Top, Inc. filed a voluntary petition to effect an arrangement with creditors, listing liabilities of \$136,108 and assets of \$43,500. Of this \$3,238.14 was wages and \$132,870.79 for unsecured loans. Seven radio stations were among the unsecured creditors. A \$35,000 loan was owed by the corporation to Sunrock personally. Sunrock asked that the show be allowed to remain open. He planned to cut the number of acts and reduce weekly expenses from \$2,500 to \$1,600. He set up a program of daily payments and arranged to continue showing.

On June 24 Sunrock was forced to skip a performance when he could not come up with an installment payment. After meeting with his backers the money was raised in time for an evening performance. A couple of additional performances were later cancelled. Finally on June 28 the acts were called out when he failed to raise any money toward the bond. The final performance was given on June 27. Red-headed Larry promptly announced that he would reopen on July 1 after a reorganization of the show which never occurred.

Meanwhile Spangles was not doing so hot either. It was not drawing crowds in spite of on-going publicity and great reviews. The July 31 *Billboard* noted: "Mike Jacobs, boxing promoter, would like to have Madison Square Garden back by about August 15, according to the sports grapevine. Reports of unprofitable business for the Ringling Spangles, now in the Garden and announced to run until September 1, have led to the belief in some

circles that the circus management will not object to the reported Jacobs plan.

"The Spangles performance is generally praised by spectators, but observers point out that not until this week has advertising focused attention on the \$1.10 seats and that attendance also has been hurt by lack of publicity on the half price offered to those under twelve years.

"Jacobs is said to have penciled in some bouts for the Garden between August 15 and Labor Day. Reports that second string fight promoters may take over the Larry Sunrock Big Top Circus location behind the Roxy Theater, as the canvas is still in the air, for \$2-top bouts have given rise to talk that Jacobs would like quick action in getting back into the Garden.

Missouri, Chicago, St. Louis and Cleveland, as well as some coast spots already booked. Three spots are said to be interested in having Spangles for the week following its New York closing, but some of the spots would find the Ringling show fighting a Shrine circus and Olver stated that it is not the policy of the management to oppose any aggregation booked in before it is. So no opening date has been set.

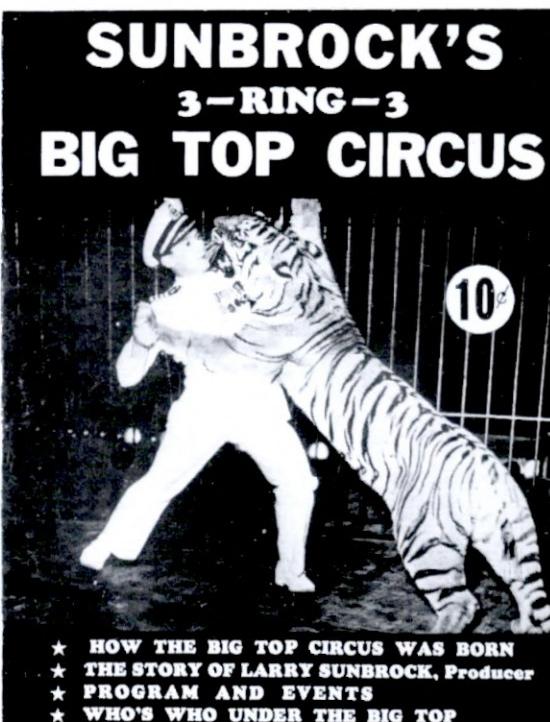
"Olver backed the Spangles management's statement that Jacobs would not stage any bouts until after Labor Day with facts regarding the Garden cooling system. He pointed out that the Carrier installation was not meant for fight crowds. The Garden set-up for the one ring circus provides for a top box office of 6,200 seats, with no expectation of selling more than 3,700. Newspapers that raised the heated Garden when some summer fights were staged have, said Olver, praised the cooling system as it is working now.

"Management also stated that the stress on \$1.10 seats started three weeks ago, not last week, although admitting that the stress was 'somewhat belated.' Week-end business is down, not up the way it is for legit attractions in town. Back of reasons for continuing is said to be the belief that there is a place in New York for a summer circus and that if the idea doesn't pay off in 1943 it will in 1944-'45."

Fights or no fights, business for the Ringling step-child was not good. Word on the closing appeared in the August 14 *Billboard*: "Ringling Bros. Spangles circus closes at the Garden after the performances of August 17 (Tuesday) and will immediately prepare for fall-winter indoor engagements. The shattering is in line with a prediction by the *Billboard* two issues ago that the show would vacate the Garden to pave the way for boxing schedules in the arena on or about August 15, a statement heatedly denied by the management, which 'insisted' that the circus would remain until September 7.

"Hal Olver, speaking for the management, now says that an early September indoor date opener makes it necessary that the show close in August to provide time for reshuffling the circus deck, altering it extensively for road stands.

"Initial spot is carded for the arena in Providence September 11 week, followed by week-long stands in Toronto and Montreal. Other cities are being lined up and a few long dates on the Coast, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, are in view. Arena Managers' Association is handling booking.



Cover of the Sunrock Big Top Circus program.

"Following the Sunrock bankruptcy proceedings, formation of a new Delaware corporation to refinance Sunrock, not necessarily in New York, has been reported. Those close to the red-haired promoter have declared there is not a chance of his reopening here."

A report in the August 7 *Billboard* commented on the future use of the Garden: "Denying reports that Mike Jacobs wanted Madison Square Garden back for late summer and early fall fights, the management of the Ringling Spangles insisted today that the show would continue at the Garden until September 7.

"Hal Olver, for the management, said that the show after that date would start a 32-week tour with dates in Kansas City,

"Local run, unprecedented for New York summer, started June 16 (sic), thus the stretch will have spanned two months and fifty-five playing days. In the first few weeks the set-up was nightly performances, except on Mondays, and matinees on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, or 10 shows a week. A few weeks ago two shows daily except Monday were instituted, and the afternoon shows, particularly those held this week, have picked up considerably to the point where they were beating the nights. Past Wednesday matinee (4) was the biggest of the run so far. The claimed total attendance up to Sunday is 173,000.

"To ease the road tour, virtually all equipment will be portablized, including the big stage and bandstand. The trick will move over railroad on 12 cars, including sleepers. Among acts to be retained are panto comic A. Robins, horseman Dr. Herman Ostermaier, the Court trained animal contingent with Harry and May Kovar and the elephant troupe. Layout and talent will be revamped for the tour, which will be under the direction of Charles Sparks, general manager.

"Local billing has varied from emphasis on 'Spangles' to accentuation on 'Ringling Bros.' and 'Continental Circus,' but for the road the advertising will plug 'The Continental Circus. Spangles, presented by Ringling Bros.'"

For a number of reasons the planned tour of the show fell through. The August 21 *Billboard* told the story: "Although Ringling Bros.' Spangles Circus announced last week that the show would take to the road shortly after exiting from the Garden next Tuesday (17th) there has been a change of mind and the road tour has been abandoned, at least for the time being. Idea may flare up again when the Ringling-Barnum show closes its season in November, thus making acts from the Big Show available for Spangles if and when the latter decides to tour.

"It is claimed that the arena in Providence which had been scheduled for the initial date, September 11 week, had no basement to accommodate animals, but why the tentative booking was made under these conditions was not explained.

"In the meantime Hal Olver, who shares the press corps direction with Don McCloud has been retained by Big Show publicity director Roland Butler as a story man and joins in Detroit today. McCloud will finish up the Spangles run. Death in Toledo August 8 of Ray Peacock, former AP man who became attached to the RB press department this spring, may have hastened Olver's appointment, although it had been previously understood that Olver would have a spot with the Ring-

ling circus after the Spangles engagement."

Charles Sparks wrote George Smith, manager of the Ringling-Barnum show, on August 3, 1943: "I will arrange to ship the tiger and lion act as per your request.

"Joe Donahue had given me in-

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**RINGLING BROS SPANGLES**

**CONTINENTAL CIRCUS**

**SPECIAL PERFORMANCES MON. Aftn and Night, JULY 5**

**MIGHTLY EXC. MENJ.**  
at 8.30  
**AFTERNOON, TUES., THURS., SAT. and SUND. at 2:15**

**BAZZUMING IMPRESSION**—"It is actually  
absolutely different... Presenting only the  
best and the most brilliant performers..."—PORT

**LAWRENCE STERKOFF**—"The English spectator  
initially dissatisfied... was converted by the  
skill and artistry shown...—N. Y. TIMES

**MOST REVERED TRADITION**—"Spangled" is  
the one show that has been the big draw  
for years...—JOURNAL OF AMERICA

**GOOD SHOW**—"It's a good show... It will  
stay in the annals of all time...—NEWS

**AM. ESTABLISHED 1871**—"Spangled proves  
it has a future... We are established 100."  
—WORLD-TELEGRAM

**REINATIONAL**—"Spangled" has assumed  
Mad a new dimension of magnificence...—T. Y. DRISCOLL

**WHAT ENTERTAINMENT**—"A real 'spectacle'  
on your 'MILLION DOLLAR' stage... it is great enter-  
tainment..."—MERRIE

**A NEW PERSPECTIVE**—"The audience seemed  
to feel a new pleasure in the manner of  
the performers affected by European  
methods of presentation..."—HERALD-TRIBUNE

**IMPRESSIVE AND FRESH**—"A new date late  
Ringling Bros. lumbered along... Team-  
work is efficient and fine...—KRTINE EAGLE

**IT'S GLOBAL**—"It's not continental... It's  
global...—H. T. SUN

**BIT-FILLING**—COMPOSITION—"Spangled"  
is a picture of pure quality... The  
compelling and most fascinating drama intro-  
duced in colorful history of the circus...  
—JOHN NEWS

**Prices: ALL PERFORMANCES** EXCEPT THURSDAY  
★ ★ ★ \$1.10, \$1.65, \$2.20 and \$2.75 including Tax  
★ ★ ★ Saturday Night and July 4 \$1.10, \$1.65, \$2.20, \$2.75 and \$3.30 including Tax  
★ ★ ★ Children Under 12 Half Price Tuesday and Thursday Afternoons  
★ ★ ★ **TICKETS NOW ON SALE AT GARDEN** ★ ★ ★  
MAIL ORDERS PROMPTLY FILLED

Spangles newspaper ad used on July 4, 1943.

structions to arrange with the New York Central for a balloon top baggage car to ship this act, but will disregard this order and arrange for the shipment in the elephant car."

On August 24 Sparks wrote Donahue: "We shipped the leopard and puma act in a 70 foot baggage car; the Spangles equipment in a 50 foot automobile car and a 40 foot box car; and the elephants in a baggage car to Sarasota."

The same day Sparks wrote Smith: "We are closing the Spangles office at the Garden today. I mailed you, under separate cover, an inventory of the property and equipment which was shipped.

"I forgot to mention to you about Ostermaier. I think he rung in an extra horse on us as I was always under the impression that he had three, but when I loaded the car, there were four horses. This extra horse was in the Cristiani stalls in the basement, and I thought it belonged to the Cristianis. But in questioning Ostermaier down at the train when we were loading, he said that he had purchased it from the Cristiani troupe. I think he has put one over on us."

The battle of the Manhattan summer circuses came to a close. There was no winner; they both flopped. The Sunbrook tent, in poor repair, remained for a few weeks, as did the Proske tiger act. The Spangles show went back to Sarasota and New York had to wait until the spring of 1944 to see another circus.

Epilog

The New York fiasco was not the last the circus business heard from Larry Sunbrook.

In March 1944 in Milwaukee garnishment actions were filed after the closing of the Sunbrook Circle A Rodeo and Hollywood Thrill Show. In a few days he had settled this beef with an \$8,350 payment.

Also in March of 1944 the U.S. District Court in New York brought suit against Sunbrock and Big Top, Inc., charging them with criminal violations, of the War Production Board's orders prohibiting use of restricted materials in construction of the tent used in New York in 1943. On March 26, 1944 Sunbrock was hauled into a New York Special Sessions Court and paid a fine of \$5000 after pleading guilty to a charge of failing to pay \$12,000 in salaries from the ill-fated Big Top Circus.

The receipts from a Sunbrock thrill show in Columbus, Ohio in October 1944 were attached by the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS claimed he owed \$31,309 on admission, income and Social Security taxes.

On February 26, 1945 he opened the "Fourth annual wild west rodeo and big top thrill circus" in the Chicago Coliseum. Appearing in the 52 act show were the Cole Bros. elephants, Bill Bloomburg's liberty horses, Con Colleano, clowns Otto Griebling and Freddie Freeman, Selden the Stratospher Man, a number of cowboys and a sprinkling of auto thrill show acts. Although the show attracted 30,000 spectators in a single weekend he had to pay \$10,000 for unauthorized advertising of the "Lone Ranger." Sunbrock settled the beef with a \$500 payment.

Sunbrock continued in 1945 with a big show in the Los Angeles Coliseum. He also produced a show in Tampa, Florida in December of that year.

I became acquainted with Sunbrock and Jack Andrews when they produced a thrill show in Columbus, Ohio in the spring of 1943. While in New York City I visited the Big Top Circus before it opened. He was something to see in action.

The colorful showman had fallen and rose to promote again. He was truly one of outdoor show business' most colorful personalities.

**I**t was in Semans, Saskatchewan on August 31 that Marion Clarke made her debut in her new iron jaw butterfly act. She had been working toward this all summer. I had helped her right from the start. I didn't mind doing this but Joe was so blamed jealous of her. When she first started to rehearse she would go into a spin and when lowered down had me standing there to grab her. She got awfully dizzy. I would grab her by the shoulders and Joe would be giving me dirty looks and saying, "let her go, Slim, gawd damn you, let her go." But this I wouldn't do until she gave me the signal. So all summer long, in between shows, instead of laying around or up town in a beer joint, I would be in there helping her.

We had to enlist four guys to pull her aloft and it got so every day at that time the boys would be heading for the brush to get away from that chore. After Booster joined out he was always willing though.

Her debut was a success and she got much applause. The music for her act was *She's Just an All American Girl*. I thought at the time how appropriate as she was some from some place in Indiana and how much more American can you get.

For a little old show there were some good acts with it. I have never seen a better tumbling table act than Billy Lerche's. Barney Aronsen had a unique wire balancing act. He balanced himself on a chair and for the finale did a hand stand from the chair back. His feet almost brushed the canvas as he did this. Trudie kind of beautified the act by handing him up the chair parts.

The Barth family had an outstanding tumbling act. They worked on a forty foot pad. The two children, Virginia and Lee, would over-shoot the pad most of the time by twenty feet. They were just a blur going past. The father Jules and Lee had a comic knock-about on a small table and it was good. Jo the mother had a single trapeze act and she was good at toe catches.

Billy Grant done contortion on the Roman rings and a balancing act with a glass of water. He had the smallest trunk with it. It was at least one third smaller than the standard Taylor trunk that most people had. I was in the men's dressing room one day and Billy was all curled up in the top tray taking a nap. Jack DeShon told me that it was a common sight. Billy was a thin man, but was at least five feet eight in height. I marveled how he could sleep all balled up like that.

Jennie and Billy Lerche had a Roman ring act also. Billy would go up town with the band; he played some kind of an instrument. The big show band would also

# COOPER BROS. CIRCUS

On the Road with  
Elmer Jones in 1936

## PART THREE

By Todd Davenport

bally the side show. Billie was the banner painter and was in several clown skits.

Jack was the producing clown and Parento was a clown, but Jimmy, Barney and Billy doubled as joeys. Jack worked hard to produce new acts. He was always scheming away. He also worked the come in.

Capt. Irwin had what animal acts there was with it. To give credit where it was due he was good to animals. He had 15 assorted pooches. In one act he had them all in the ring at one time. Anyone could tell by looking at them that they loved the old rascal and were happy in their work. He had a midget iron gray horse, a rosinback. While the horse would be cantering around the ring a dog would be doing somersaults and posing on one foot. His pick out pony act was good and caused much merriment among the tip. But one thing he did caused Billy Grant to swear. The Captain would announce that the pony had performed before the crowned heads of the United States.

He had the leaping greyhounds, a blind dog that went up a ladder and jumped off, a wire walking French poodle, and

This photo of Elmer Jones' 1924 Cole Bros. Circus illustrates the type of cars used on the Cooper show in 1936. The knockdown gilly wagon is in front of the baggage car at right. The coach on this show was also No. 7. Pfening Archives.

Diamond the mule in the January act. Diamond was a real small compact animal, very intelligent and a glossy black. At cue he could lash out with both hind feet and strike out with his front ones. But he had to be cued to do this. If the town dogs got to bothering him he would kick out at them. Irwin was trying to teach them Wild Fire something or another. He had an old English shepherd that didn't seem to do anything. For some reason he got the idea that he was to protect the band boys backs. Twice a day he would come in and station himself behind them and if anyone came under the sidewall he was ready for a fight. If the person was with it he would settle back down. But if it was a towner he went into rage and would drive them back out.

It was a drag about the show, what with banner and concert announcements, it really didn't have much of a beginning or ending.

I helped some with the wild west show. It started with Joe and Marion's whips and ropes. Peggy Ward did Cossack riding. Hot Cakes and Diamond did the unrideable mule. Blondie Ward rode the bucking horse and that was it, a weak show. But at times it got wild and wooly as anyone would desire.

In the west the newspaper ads would state if anyone had a horse they wanted broken to bring it in and "our" cowboys would break them. Blondie was "our" cowboys. Joe was the pick up man, but wasn't much of a horseman. Some of those wild broncos really put on a good show. Joe was slow about grabbing them so Blondie got wracked up more than once.

There was a big chestnut Kentucky thoroughbred stallion by the name of Cobalt that was used as a bucking horse. Cobalt was a fine animal but at times went slightly insane, or so they thought. I thought it was because he was high strung and nervous by nature and he was afraid when under canvas, especially if the wind was blowing. He done more injury to Blondie than all them western



broncos combined. There wasn't any chute and we had to saddle him and Blondie had to mount him on the run at times. All Cobalt wanted to do was get out of the tent. He tore the hell out of things getting out at times. Once outside he gentled down.

There wasn't a water wagon with it and we had to take the horses to the water. Either Little Red or I could ride him bareback with only a halter on him. Dick, the horse that Peggy rode, was a true barnyard lout. Stubborn and mean, he could kick the stars out of heaven. Her life was in danger every second she was up on him. During her act men had to be at every center pole to keep him from bashing out her brains.

Early one morning before the stock had been unloaded Elmer came by and Dick lashed out with both hind feet and kicked a hole though the car. A piece of board about two feet long sailed out and knocked his hat off. He turned pale and hurried on, perhaps thinking of how his brother died from the kick of a horse.

Capt. Irwin took it on himself to help out with the after show. One day Blondie was bucked off and tossed up against a pole. There he lay kind of stunned with blood running out of his one elbow. His back was to the tip. Capt. started to holler at me to turn him over so the chumps could not see the blood. I did no such thing. I took him out to the pad room and got the medical kit and fixed him up. Then Irwin was bruting about that I was a bum trouper. This man was a troublesome person in lots of ways.

There was one of the baggage stock animals that was touchy about his feet. When he had to be reshod Red would get me to go to the blacksmith with him, as we would have to throw him. One day we put a rope burn on his ankle doing this. We put some salve on it. Back on the lot someone asked Irwin what was the matter with the horse. He said it was due to lazy drivers, that horse had "scratches." "It come from getting mud in the hairs around the hooves and them guys are too lazy to brush it out."

Another time Blondie was up on a real wild bronc. The net was tied off on a quarter pole. The horse pushed his way up against the net, yanking out the pole and got half way up into the blue seats and started back down. I grabbed his nose and shut his air off. I would release my hold just enough to keep him from suffocating. There set Blondie up there with the net twined around him. The horse was up in the seats with poles float-

ing about and people screaming with old Captain yelling "ride him cowboy," pointing toward this spectacle as if they couldn't see for themselves. Blondie was real calm; he said "let him go." I did and ran up toward the front end with that bronc right behind me dragging the net and jerking out more poles. We finally got him stopped and untangled and the tip left laughing their heads off. Irwin blamed it all on me. But the people did get their two bits worth that day.

We went into Punnichy the first day of

and jumping around on fast runs. This night there was a broken spring on it, causing it to jump more about than usual. My bunk was up under the eaves and the rain came in through the cracks. I crawled down into "our parlor" where I found two hobos who had crawled in out of the rain. We sat there talking and smoking. One fellow I had met twice before, once down in Maine and we had done a thirty day stint in an Alabama prison farm together. Our crime was that we had shared our food with a black hobo. My word!

The whole country side turned out against us, with dogs and guns. I didn't have a prayer of a chance. I had been seen sitting down and eating with a nigger and was in the company of a damn Yankee. And some of my not too distant forebears had fought for their "glorious cause" too. One of the ladies had smuggled morphine and other drugs under her skirts through the Yankee lines into Richmond even.

As I was a juvenile up before a lady judge, she had nothing but scorn for me, saying that I was worse than a Yankee. I was a traitor. The little black bo escaped altogether.

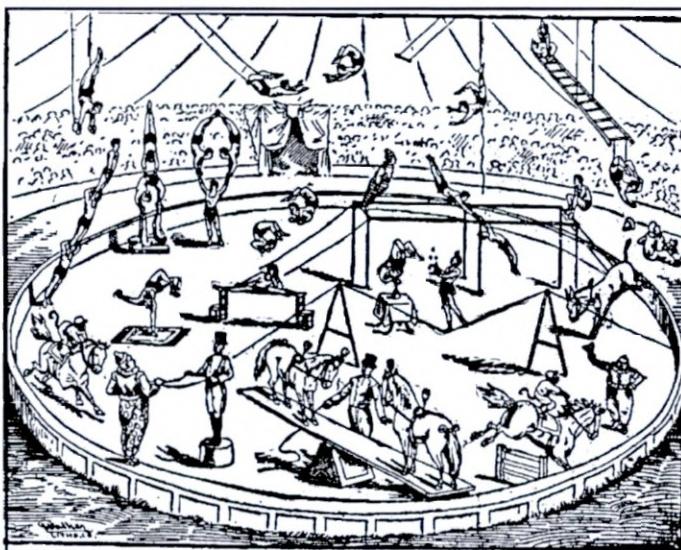
A few weeks later on I ran into him on the Al C. Hanson Shows lot down along the Bayou St. John in New Orleans. He thought it was just about the funniest thing he had ever heard of. He laughed until he cried.

I asked the two of them if they wanted to join us. They said no, that they were going to go south out of Winnipeg and planned to catch the Royal American Shows in St. Paul. They had been "timber" at those big celebrations and fairs in western Canada and was figuring on working their way south for the winter.

Little Red came crawling into the parlor swearing away. The roof had started to leak right over his hammock.

We sat there chewing the rag and smoking. Curley crawled out of his nest and ordered the two boes to hit the gritty. My gosh, that train was going at least sixty miles per hour. It would have been sure death to have unloaded out of the car at that speed. Red and I started to argue with him, asking him how he would like to join the birds on such a night. The engineer was blowing way up ahead. Someone said he was blowing for a stop. And sure enough the train began to slow down. We were in Rivers. The two hobos got off and went up ahead to look for an empty box car. We sat and dozed until it got light.

I have always thought that we had an angel riding with us that season. That oil



September. This was a strange place. There were mountains and plains in all directions, but this place had hills, gullies, draws, ravines, lots of timber and good water. The street ran up from the railroad, quite steep. The lot was at the end of it. At noon a bunch of us were walking toward the cars for dinner. I saw Frank Miester talking to what I figured was a real Britisher, Bowler hat, umbrella, monocle and mustache. He saw us coming; Frank had his back to us. The fellow adjusted his monocle and said "my word, what manner of men are these approaching us?"

Frank looked around and said, "they are just some of the boys." The man looked perplexed and said: "boys, boys you say, they look more like they just escaped from Bedlam." I suppose we did look a trifle scuffy.

Back out on the plains we played Ituna and Melville. Just after we got loaded in Melville it started to rain. No storm, just a cold rain being driven along by winds. It was the first real rain we had seen in weeks.

On the run into Rivers, Manitoba we were hooked on to the tail end of a fast freight. The chogger was really walkin' the dog across that level country. The rain was coming down in buckets full. That old No. 7 car always did a lot of bucking

lantern would burn all night long, swaying and jerking up and down. Had it exploded we wouldn't have had a prayer of a chance.

That was a miserable day in Rivers. The rain never stopped and it was also cold. That rich black gumbo turned into a sticky mess. It balled up on the horses' feet and even on the tires of the wagon wheels. It was on our feet as well. But by pushing and shoving we bulled our way through, got set up and gave two shows to light crowds, tore down and somehow got loaded up.

The next day in Portage Las Prairie was more of the same. Poor biz, rain, muck and cold winds. We lost Tiger Jack there. After everything was set up he was out in the front yard singing "rain when you goin' rain again showers, My blessings on thee." Mrs Jones started to give him a going over saying that the show was doing bum business with all this rain and here he was chirping like a robin for more and did he want to hoodoo it and that perhaps he was a Jonah who had caused all the grief. He just walked off the lot and that was the last we saw of him that season.

Now to the east of us was Winnipeg. We were to show in Transcona, a suburb, on Monday September 7. Winnipeg was a big wonderful city with a big skid row. Booster laid claim that he knew it well. This was the spot the lads had been looking for all season for a roust. Booster had a load of stuff hid away in the car that he was going to sell to a fence in Winnipeg.

That Saturday night, after we got loaded, he came to me and started to boast how his way of life was so much better than mine. He had been drinking some. He took a flashlight and took me into one part of the car and showed his pile of loot. He was proud of it, telling me how much he expected to get out of it the next day. He said it would take me a whole season of hard work to earn that much. I just walked away, but I couldn't help but to pity him some, thinking how did a man get all twisted up like that. I certainly wasn't any saint, but I thought different than he did. My father told me over and over never, never steal, and that I had a tongue in my head and to use it.

The next morning we woke up on a siding near the round house and repair shops of the Canadian National. Right across the river was a big beautiful city. The church bells were ringing out all over it.

After a bit some sour-looking railroad hands came out and jacked up the car, grousing all the while. But they did take out the broken spring and replaced it. One of them thought he was cute, telling us that we had better get this tinker toy set south in a hurry or we might get snow



D. C. Hawn, general agent Cooper Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.

bound. This amused me. We had called it just about everything we could think of but a tinker toy set. That was priceless.

Someone once called it an aggravating aggregation of rotten ropes and mildewed canvas with muscle bound acrobats and spavined horses.

I liked the people in western Canada. Most of them were out-going and friendly. But once in a while we would run into a clinker. One evening in an Alberta town Little Red came to me and wanted me to take over Tommie's team as he was drunk as a lord. I took a load of trunks. It was kind of a bad place to get off the lot onto the road. Some town kid was sitting up on the load, just a tad, chewing tobacco and spitting all over everything. The two prop boys were going to walk, as those trunk wagons were plumb dangerous to ride on. I told the boy to quit his spitting and to climb down, that it was not safe to ride. He did get down, but was awful lippy about it. I got off and onto the road all right, but a voice asked me, "I hope you don't call yourself a skinner, do you?" There was that damn punk sitting back on the load. I asked him, what I did that was so wrong? "The way you come off that lot you just crept off, you should have come out of there hell to larruping." I told him, "you smart little punk, I thought I told you to get off and quit spitting all over the trunks, you little bastard you." When I unhitched at the train and was going to mount the night horse to ride back out to the lot, he started to climb up on the horse. I just grabbed him and kicked him away from the team. He

must have felt he wasn't welcome as he didn't bother me no more.

The ghost walked while we were still on the siding at the shops. The boys hiked across a railroad bridge toward the city, two of them helping Booster to carry his loot. Just a few of us stayed with the train, Little Red, Joey, Willie, Hot Cakes and myself. I suppose that Cakes reasoned that here we were in a railroad center with lines going in every direction and so what was the use of any hanky panky on his part. Or perhaps he was just tired.

A switch engine took us out to Transcona. Elmer came out all full of energy with a suit case. He was going up into the town. He wanted us to move on to the lot. I told him that we were short of help. He said to do the best I could and handed me a map of the streets going out to the lot. There wasn't any twenty-four hour man and Mr. Hawn would send these home made maps back to the show. Elmer grabbed a trolley and that was the last we saw of him for a few days.

We got the prop-canvas wagon assembled and loaded it with the pad room top and everything that went with it. We started for the lot, driving and leading the lead stock. The lot was three miles away on the other side of town, right down the main stem. There was a double set of trolley tracks running down the center of the street, but there wasn't much automobile traffic and very few people about. Those that were gave us curious looks. This burg had brick streets and cement side walks, the first we had saw in a long time. The lot was a school house one. It was completely covered with water. There were side walks on three sides of it with no drains, just solid curbs and cement walks. Willie had much more experience than any of us had. He said that if we could drain off some water in one corner we could at least set up the top to stable the stock, but it was his opinion that the lot was no good. He thought the fixer ought to get out and try to find another one.

Red drove the wagon around to the back end of the lot and was going to pull up over the curb. Some civic minded gent came out of his house swacking his head off. He was afraid that we would break the curb stones. We laid down some poles and went on it. We dug a trench away from the spot and chased the water with brooms. We got a spot big enough to set up the top. Willie said that I should go back to the cars and get someone who knew something to try to get another lot, as he didn't think the stakes would hold in that soft ground, especially if the wind came up. I was awful dumb in those days. Instead of taking a trolley I walked the three miles back. The only person I found was Mrs. Jones. She said

the fixer should handle it, but he had went up into the city. She gave me some change for car fare and told me to try and find him. She said Elmer was in Winnipeg on business and would join the show somewhere in Ontario.

I couldn't find Chapman, the fixer. I was in and out of houses of ill repute that evening. I tried to find Pony Red who I thought might have some ideas. But I never saw a thing of any of those rascals.

I rode the trolley back and got on the lot. There was a steady cold rain falling. Everybody and everything was in the padroom. They had a lantern lit and was huddled around it. I told my sad story and all the boys but Red and I crawled in among the horses, dogs and ponies. Red said maybe we ought to stand guard as there had been some hecklers swearing at them in French and English and had been throwing rocks. So we sat there rolling smokes and talking. Red and I were old buddies and had been for years.

He was a man to ride the river with, but was awful superstitious and had some odd ideas. For one thing he had spells where he thought he could see into the future. At these times his left eye would go dead on him. It looked like a dead fish's eye.

He asked me, "Todd, what in hell is going to happen to us?" I said nothing I knew of. "What if them guys don't come back from Winnipeg?

What if Elmer has went on home? We got a thousand miles of wilderness to troupe across. We ain't going to make any money in them railroad towns. What if Elmer has blown. Mrs. might close it and ship it home or she may find a place to store it up in this god forsaken country and we would have to hobo back to Niagara." I told him not to worry.

The next morning some of the boys came back and some didn't. Curley looked as though he had been in a fight. They all looked mean. The fixer was no place to be seen. So we set it up.

At noon I was hiking up through the business district and ran head on into Chapman. He looked terrible. His eyes were blood shot and as the old saying goes: "his breath would have opened the locks." He started right in on me. "So you have been sneaking around behind my back have you. Trying to make out that I have not been doing my job, have you. You dirty lying punk, you first of May.

Why before you were born I had been to California eleven times. I was fixer on the Walter L. Main, Sig Sautelle and J. A's Cole show." There were women and kids all taking this in and I didn't want to shock them so I just went on and left him swearing.

After dinner I walked back to the lot with Mrs. Jones and I told her the show was short of working help. She said, "raids the hobo jungles." I didn't think that would do any good as the harvest was still going on. Anyone who wanted to work was out there working. But I did find six rascals who wanted to go east. The way it was the Mounties wouldn't let anyone go east, but west toward the harvest was all right. That is the only reason those rascals joined out.

The ale label was still sticking to the side of the car and the boys were just about crazy over it.

Business was light in Transcona. The next morning we were back in the jungles of Ontario at Reddith. This was a railroad division point and a real small town. Again the howls went up, who booked this spot? And Chapman explained that it had a big surrounding country. Sure it was big, but what was in it, Indians, trappers, wolves, bears and snakes.

But worst of all that label had disappeared off the wall. It was no place to be found. The boys thought it was some kind of an omen. It had been stuck up there the night we left Ontario and had disappeared the night we re-entered it.

Curley went to Mrs. Jones with a tale of woe. He was sick and he didn't want any of the new men. He wanted me, so I went back on the props once again for what was left of the season.

It was cold in Reddith. The lot was down by a lake and Indians was out in canoes harvesting the wild rice crop. The matinee was terrible, just a hand full showed up. When Capt. Irwin made his announcement about the pony performing before all the crowned heads of the United States they booed him.

After supper I walked back to the lot through a fine cold rain. I was doing something in the big top and Marion came in and I said it was nearly cold enough to snow. She said "if you want to see it snowing just look out in the back yard." Sure enough it was coming down. Marion asked me, "you know something Slim? This is my last season on the road. When I get this one in I am going home to that big old farm house and stick my feet in the oven and eat apples and I won't

even go into town on circus day, to hell with it."

Curley was up in his bunk with a bottle of Spruce top hooch that I had got for him from an Indian. He was sick.

Little Joe had thought it all out and I thought that he did quite a good job of it for a retarded kid from Greensburg, Pennsylvania. He told me that Booster and Curley had been "thicker than thieves," that they had some kind of a deal between themselves. He thought that Curley let Booster stash his loot in the car with the understanding that he would share in the sale in Winnipeg and something had gone awry and that they had a fight.

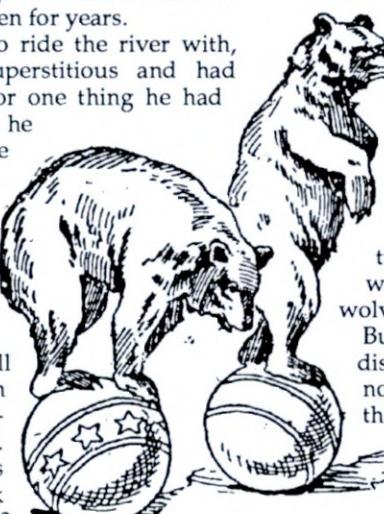
I went to Pony Red and asked him if he would lend me one of those rascals for the night. He told me that they were holed up in the round house and had refused to come out. They didn't think any one in his right mind would work out in such weather.

I took it on myself to go up there and have a talk with them. I explained that we had to show, we had to tear it down and get it to the next town. Otherwise there wouldn't be any meals, no pay and no Toronto. So they turned out. On the way back to the lot one was kind of sneering about the uproar that label caused. I told them if they wanted to reach Toronto in good health they ought to keep their mouths closed and not to wonder about anything they might hear or see.

About a one half house showed up that night. We were surprised; we didn't think anyone would come. We had an awful time that night with the frozen canvas, but we made it all right.

Little Red was hooked on to the prop-canvas wagon and Tommie was behind with the light plant. We had to cross the railroad's main line to get to the siding where the cars were spotted. There was the Canadian National's crack Halifax to Vancouver train on the crossing and we had to wait. It was a long heavy train with many Pullman cars. There sat Red, Joey and I. From where we were we could look into a compartment.

There was a couple in there. The man was a well groomed white haired gent, the lady was some years younger. She sat there with her hair piled up on her head with ear rings. We could see the lights flickering on them. She was smoking a holder about a foot long. The gent was smoking a cigar. The door opened and a darkie came in with a tray and set drinks before them. This was all very interesting to us. The horses gazed in there with their ears up. I don't think that couple looked out once. Red got to fuming, asking why, why, why couldn't it have been him in that compartment with the woman instead of that old rube? I tried to cheer him



up by saying, "Why Red here you are a young healthy bucko of a lad and he is an old man about to take his final bow and ankle off. If he would look out here he no doubt would envy us."

Red said, "Todd you are nuts and always have been. Tonight when he is west bound in that nice warm car in the kip with that beautiful girl we will be heading east in that cold old car, with a bunch of maniacs for company." Then he began to wave his hand and to sway about, saying "I can see it all many years from now. I can see you on a muddy lot. You are with a mud show, you are carrying the laying out pins for a better man than you, you are old, toothless, your feet hurt, you have a far away look in your puss."

I asked what he would be doing. "Oh," he said, "I will have wised up and quit the road. I will have a wife and daughter and a nice home with a good clean berth. I will walk onto the lot and pity you."

(Red did get his home and wife and daughter, but he hated it all. The last time I saw him he had turned over everything to his wife and daughter and was heading toward Hugo, Oklahoma. He never made it. He died of a heart attack enroute. At New Castle, Pennsylvania his wife didn't come to the funeral. His daughter did come. She had him buried in New Castle to save the expense of shipping the body back to Baltimore. She had him buried in the morning so she could get back home that night.)

Back to Reddith. The engineer gave the high all and the streak of varnish pulled out fast. We went on to the cars.

In Sioux Lookout the next day the sun came out and it was a beautiful day and we done good biz there.

In Armstrong Elmer rejoined it. I think his little vacation done him good as he looked relaxed and was in a pleasant mood. Hot Cakes got sick there and Capt. Irwin wanted me to take his place. I did, but wasn't happy about it.

From there we were to make a fast freight haul behind an express train to Hornepayne, a distance of 244 miles. Elmer gave each one of us some change so we could buy some grub for breakfast as he didn't want us to try making a cookhouse, afraid we might get killed. That was one side of his character that most don't know about.

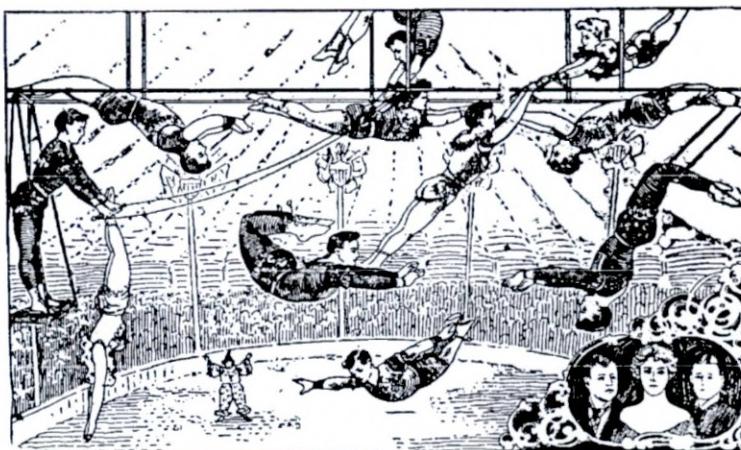
It was a fast run without hardly any stops. In Nakina it stopped long enough to change engine crews and engines. We arrived in Hornepayne about 11 a. m. There wasn't any matinee. Hot Cakes felt

some better and Curley was back on the job. I was all set to go up into town and get a hair cut, hire a bath, and perhaps get a decent meal and a bottle of that Black Horse ale. But Marion got ahold of me and got me to handle her iron jaw rigging while she rehearsed.

To our dismay we found that we had lost one Booster but had six more. They spent the afternoon shop lifting. These were the no goods who joined in Transcona.

The next day in Foley yet they just about trod the town. It was just a little French burg with no roads leading into it, just a railroad town. The lot was a sandy one laying in between the railroad yards and the main and only street. Right across the way was a hotel with a "licensed premises." Just as soon as it opened its doors a path was beat across the dirt street to it by nearly every one with it.

Curley got into some kind of state of



mind, illusions of grandeur or something. He would help set up the pad room and while Joey and I would set up the show he would sit in a folding chair and watch us. During the show he would sit along side of Billy. This caused Billy to do a slow burn. I think that Chapman had worked on him same as he did Scratchey and tried it on Pony Red.

We ran into a problem that morning in Foley yet. I was driving a stake for Barney's wire act and it just disappeared down into the earth. An old man, a towner who was hanging around, let out a cackle and whooped out, "by gum you have found the old deep well." When he got done laughing he explained. The station had at one time sat on this ground and had dug a well. It burned down one cold winter night and it was rebuilt where it stood at that time to the east a ways. The old site had been leveled off.

This caused us to change things around some. That well site was about where Lee Barth would land when he came off the

end of the pad. Mrs. Barth from the first had cautioned us about such things as pot holes, rooks and the like. Virginia had double joints and could have easily broken an ankle and double joints were harder to mend than single ones. I had a vision of Lee coming down and disappearing into the bowels of the earth. We put a rope fence around the spot.

I had been having feet trouble. In the spring I had bought a pair of cheap shoes for \$1.98. They must have been made of green cowhide and were cramping my feet. I made up my mind to buy a pair of them well cured horse hide logging boots. I had lost my pocket knife and didn't feel right without one. So I went on a shopping spree. I went up to the Hudson Bay Store and the man didn't want to let me in. I told him what I wanted and showed him my money.

He asked me if I was with the circus. I told him that I was. Then he told me that some circus guys had been in there and he was afraid that they had stolen some things, but he couldn't prove it. He had got a telephone call from Hornepayne that we were a bad bunch and he wanted to know if they were to be next. I told him, "Oh my gosh, I don't know," that one place looked the same to me as the other. I didn't keep track of all them towns. I bought a knife, a pair of socks and the boots and paid him. He said, "Young man, I advise you to get away from that lot and find some other way to make a living." I quizzed him about what them guys looked like. He said that the ring leader was a slight built blond fellow who carried a rain coat over his one shoulder and that the rest was just shills for him. I thanked him and left but thought that the description fitted Booster and he was trailing the show.

I got that hair cut and bath that I aimed to get the day before and put on the new socks and boots. That shopping had cost me a month's salary. I came up to the hotel and thought, now for that bottle of Black Horse.

The pad room was directly across from the joint. Marion was standing in the back yard and she waved to me and motioned for me to come. I thought what to hell does she want now. It wasn't even dinner time as yet. When I got over there she said, "Slim you had better stay sober." She had worry lines in between her eyes. She told me that things weren't right at all, that that lowdown bunch that had joined out in Transcona was pretty drunk already and that they were leading some of

the boys astray. She said a townner had told her that they were getting afraid and that there was talk of having a Mountie come in. So I didn't get that bottle of ale after all. She was right, there was a lot of drunkenness on the lot.

Surprisingly we had a good tip for the matinee. Curley was conspicuous by his absence. I couldn't figure out what had got into the man. He had always been a good trouper, if nothing else.

When I went for supper the cook was on the war path. There was seating room for eight and we ate in relays. But that evening I didn't have to wait. That's what he was so mad about. They would show up late and abuse him.

That night was like a nightmare. By slough time there was only three of us with it, Joey, Little Red and myself. There was a cold steady rain falling. Even Willie had crawled into his bunk. He may have been sick though. Joe Robinson was doing his job.

Among other things I had to drive a team. The performers came back on the lot and got it off. There were some drunks laying around. I didn't bother to haul any of them to the cars. In fact I didn't take any precautions about not running over them. I was just too tired and disgusted to care. The only reason that some of them were not run over and killed was that the horses of course wouldn't walk over them.

When we got loaded and I was helping Red stable the horses in the car I was so tired that I didn't pay it too much mind at the time, but wondered about since. I thought I saw Booster and Curley arguing about something. This was just before daylight on Sunday morning.

We went into Gogama to show there on Monday. It was a cold gloomy day with the clouds flying so low they looked like snow clouds. The lot was the fairgrounds. Some of those drunks were still back in Foleyet. Pony Red must have been left there. The fairgrounds gate was chained with a log chain and one of the largest pad locks I had ever seen. A little fat man stood in front of it. Someone said get a sledge and bust it. The man started to shout, "Non, Non." Willie went out and started to converse with him in French. After a long time Willie turned around grinning to himself and told us that this man was the mayor and a peaceable man, but that he was a Carkajou [?] when aroused and he would not permit us to break the lock. Willie asked him if he had the key. Oh my no, his son had the key. Where in the hell was the son? Out in the bush. When would he return? At lunch time. But his honor might have a key at home if we would give our word of honor not to break the lock in his absence.

About then the fixer came up and started to raise hell.

He wanted to know what was going on and couldn't we do anything without him being right with us and that we wouldn't be a pimple on a real trouper's butt and a lot more. Willie turned to me and said, "Slim why don't you go with the mayor and run back with the key. You are longer

there he is officer, watch him he is a bad actor. Now Billy saw Blondie hit the boy. He said, "By Cheesus, Whitie you are lying and you know you are." He told the Mountie that it wasn't me that hit the boy. He said right is right and wrong is wrong. The Mountie said that he wasn't going to arrest anyone, that the boy had been in a lot of trouble in the town and that he would like to shake the hand of the man who had hit him. He was a puzzled Mountie. He couldn't understand why the fixer had tried to frame me. Chapman took the boy and put him in the red seats and fixed him up with a ticket for the after show. The next day he was telling around how I had caused him a lot of trouble, that through his efforts he had kept the show from being closed down or from a clem.

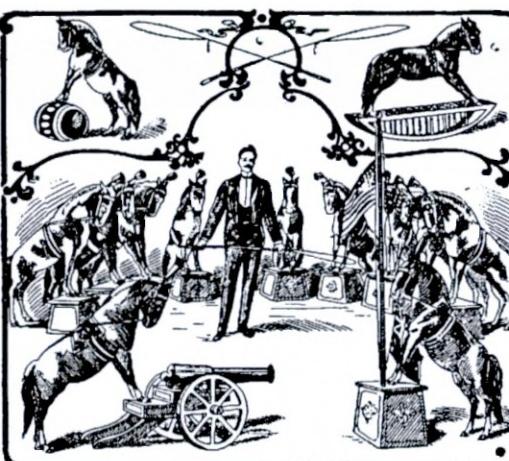
We were standing around that gate when a fellow came by with a town team hauling a load of wood. He stopped, crawled down, walked over to the gate, produced a key, unlocked the padlock, swung open the gate and bowed to us.

Pony Red and some of the boys dropped off of the afternoon freight, not all of them, praise be. He looked like he had been in one or more fights. A sick dejected Irishman, he got to ranting and raving about Britain's cruel Red, a sure sign that he was down in the dumps.

Little Chief got started on a drunk that afternoon that lasted till the early hours of Wednesday of that week. When sober he was a nice little pot bellied, pigeon-toed, bow legged Indian. At some time in his career someone slashed him across the face with a sharp blade and had driven his nose off to one side and one eyelid drooped. If he would have hoboed to Hollywood he could have made a fortune with that sinister looking face. When he got drunk he was hell-on-wheels though. At such times he had it in for Texas Joe, something about Joe owing him two bits.

Business was almost nil in Gogama. But we had high hopes for tomorrow's town, Capreal, as it was a real town, not a collection of cabins in the bush. But we got to see very little of it as our bad rep had preceded us and the working boys were denied the town. The lot was the town dump. Back of it was the railroad yards. These were the haunts of the infamous Capreal Red, a sworn enemy to all knights of the road or any drifter for that matter. What with a cop on the road out front and behind us, we just had to stay on the lot. The siding ran right into the lot. There wasn't a matinee and a cold steady rain fell all that day and night.

At that time there were two "starvation routes" in North America. One was on the Southern Pacific from El Paso to Barstow,



legged than he is." I asked him, "why don't you go, you're the one that speaks French." He said look at it this way, "if you were a Frenchman in a French town and saw a nigger running down the road, what would you think?" I got the picture in a rush. Chapman had to stick his oar in, "You dirty black coon, who are you to be giving orders, you are nothing over here and to tell this gawd damned fool to do anything." About then Willie says, "Get away from here or I'll kill you." Chapman left.

We got to the mayor's home. He first had to introduce me to his lady before he even started to search for a key. He couldn't find one. I told him that if his son came home to have him postpone his lunch and to hurry the key right out to us. This was a mistake on my part. They both filled the air with cries of anguish. No, no, first he must eat and then and only then could he bring us the key. I gave up and went back out to the gate. By this time quite a crowd had gathered, all talking at once. Willie had turned sullen and didn't seem to care if we ever got inside or not. I reckoned it was from the tongue lashing the fixer had given him. I couldn't understand Chapman at all. He seemed to hate me for some reason. I had wracked my brain trying to figure it out.

Earlier in the season Blondie Ward had hit a fellow for trying to get fresh with his wife. The fellow went to a Mountie complaining. The fixer got mixed up in it. I was standing back of Billy Grant and here come Chapman, the boy, and the Mountie. Chapman pointed at me and said

California. One could take an alternate route or even hitch hike. But the other one was across the country we had just crossed. You had to go on either the Canadian Pacific or Canadian National. There wasn't any highways at that time and if a Knight was unloaded out there he stood a good chance of dying. All show guys dreaded the thought of being red lighted in that stretch of wilderness. This Capreal Red had a bad rep from northern Canada to the Rio Grande and from the east to west coast.

Other famous bulls of that period were: Lima Slim on the Erie at Lima, Ohio; Memphis Fats on the Southern at Memphis; Conneaut Slim on the Nickle Plate at Conneaut, Ohio; White Night on the Pennsy at Williamsport, Pennsylvania; Texas Slim at Texarkana; Big Gold on the L & N at Knoxville, Tennessee and many more. All famous in the hobo land. The worst one I ever saw was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He not only carried a revolver and a sap, but he had a doubled barreled shot gun and a bulldog with him. The boys thought this wasn't cricket and disliked him a lot. His monicker was "Wauhachit Bill."

This cat and mouse game went on between not only the railroad bulls, but city dicks, town marshalls and village constables. The lads covered all the United States and Canada, where ever there was a railroad.

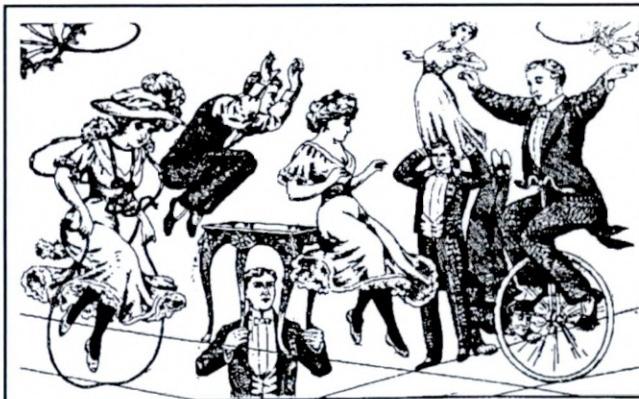
A railroad bull emptied his gun on me one night in Peru, Indiana on the C & O. He must have been insane. I went up the ladder just as fast as I could and I could hear the bullets hitting the car. At that time the police in Peru had an understanding with the circus management to keep the working men out of the city and out at quarters. There are those that may contest this, but I understood at the time that it was so.

That day in Capreal was a good one, everyone seemed to be subdued. Some of the performers worked out. There was a poker game that went on all afternoon. Marion had her usual practice session on the iron jaw rigging. Little Trudy did flip flops. She would start at the front end of the top and work her way out into the back yard and then back to the front end. I had noticed her walking through a railroad yard. She would grab a ladder on a car, hold her body straight out, come down and perhaps at the next car, do it all over again. Her father was always complaining about how long it took her to get from one place to another.

That evening just before doors we were loafing on the seats. There was a poker game going on. No one seemed to have

any ambition. The band boys sat on their chairs, every once in a while an angry Elmer would look in and shout "Music, Mr. Miester, music!" They would play a piece and relax until he yelled at them again. About this time every night Billy Grant would ask them to play *The Jungle Queen*. Billy would sit there with a far off look on his face. I often wondered what memories that tune brought back to him.

Joe Clarke was out by a pole doing something with Marion's rigging. All to once Little Chief hove into view, staggering drunk and cursing. He claimed Joe owed him a quarter and if Joe didn't cough it up he was going to kill him. Joe said, "You crazy Indian, I don't owe you



no money." Chief rushed him. There was a block and falls hanging loose and Joe took hold of it and swung it. The block connected with the Chief's forehead. He went down for the long count. Joe walked off swearing. No one moved or said anything. Just then Elmer shouted "doors." Someone said maybe we ought to move Chief out of here before the chumps came in. He was carried out into the padroom. The next day he was around with nothing but a black and blue spot on his forehead. There was about a half house that night.

The next morning in Sudbury I was shook out of my berth by a big, tough-looking, provincial cop. He was looking for stolen goods. He and the city police shook down the cars but didn't find anything. But the order went out that the working men was to stay on the lot. If they so much as stepped into the street they would be arrested. The siding ran right into the lot. It was a small one and one section of the tent was left out to get it all on. We didn't even put the prop wagon together, we just lugged everything on. The stakes on the back end of the padroom was driven in between the ties.

Another siding ran back into some woodland. I saw the original Booster hiking along it with another fellow. I wondered if he was trailing the show, or if it was just happenstance. I figured that

there was a hobo jungle back in there and had a notion to go back and perhaps visit with him. Then I thought that I had better mind my own affairs.

Trudie, who had been up to the post office, told me that there was a wanted poster up there with Booster's picture on it. He was wanted for various crimes and that there was a hefty reward for his arrest and conviction.

There was a matinee there and we had a good house that night. A blue coated cop stood sentinel duty across the street.

The next day in Coniston the sun came out and it was warm. It was just a little French farming community. No one came down to see us unload. There were two old ladies digging carrots out of their garden. They had a real neat place with a brick sidewalk running from the back porch through the garden to the privy. I saw the fixer talking to them. He came along and warned us not to bother them ladies in any way and not to use their property for a short cut to the lot.

There were still two of them, no-goods we had picked up in Transcona, with it. Everyone else went out and around those ladies' place, but them, they hiked through their garden. The old girls put up a beef and they got down right filthy with them.

No one came out to the lot to watch us put up the tents. The band went down and played in front of the hotel. They were not invited in for a drink. Matinee time came, and not a soul showed up.

A few showed up for the night show. We were attacked shortly after the show was out. We were beaten badly. That is the only time I ever show troupers beat in a clem. Them Frenchies called a halt to it before it turned into a massacre. One made a speech to us, that we were to tear down, load up and to stay on the train until departure time. He ended it by saying that perhaps we had learned a lesson not to go about insulting Madames after this. It was over them two being rude to them old ladies. The day was lost. Those people could have set fire to the show and maybe even the cars, but for some reason they stopped short of doing it.

There was some talk of red lighting them two, and after what occurred in Sturgeon Falls, the next town, we wished that we had done just that to them.

The next day was a typical Indian summer one, warm and balmy, the leaves all colored up. There seemed to be a lot of Indians in the place. In fact there didn't seem to be many white people there. We got in early and set up on a nice lot. It was a short haul from the siding.

After dinner I went up into the town

and got a hair cut and a bath. I went into the hotel and finally got that bottle of Black Horse ale. The band was playing out front and the host invited them in for free beers. That made them happy.

When I got back to the lot, happy as could be, the band was playing and it was just about time for doors. Them two no-goods were standing guard along the stake line. There was a large group of Indian squaws and little ones sitting on a bank. Them guys and the squaws were banding insults back and forth. Some of the squaws were tossing rocks at them. It looked bad to me and I thought of getting hold of Pony and have him remove them somewhere else. But I couldn't find him right off and had to get inside anyway. The house was jam packed with people. Billy was all set to blow the whistle. Chapman and a Mountie came in and talked to Billy. The Mountie went into the ring and announced that there wasn't to be a show and for everyone to leave quietly and that their money would be refunded at the door. What a disappointment!

It all came out. Bad news travels fast. The Indian ladies had stoned them two. One of them was being taken care of by a doctor. The Mounties didn't want a riot to break out and took over. We were to tear down, load up and the first east bound train was to latch on to us and take us to North Bay. The Mountie took care of everything. He told the station agent to stop the first east bound. He got them two rascals, one with a bandaged head, and put them on the train. A long freight stopped and put us on the head end. The Mountie rode in the kitchen in the car. If he hadn't been riding right along with us there surely would have been a red lighting party. We had lost two days and been in a clem on account of them. We got into North Bay way ahead of time. The fixer showed up and told us to move onto the lot. Someone asked him where Elmer was. He told us that he was laying in his berth, speechless.

The lot was a small one right up in the business district in between a movie theater and a hardware store. It was Cul de Sac, and there wasn't any drive into it. We had to lay down seat planks up over the curbs and side walk. A big cop saw that we did this. It was so narrow that just one wagon went in at a time. First was the prop-canvas wagon. The padroom was set up then the two loads of trunks, the light plant wagon, the big top poles and canvas, and finally the seats and the side show. The cop wouldn't allow the wagons to be parked along the curb so they had to be taken back to the siding.

There was a clothes pole set in the lot.

One of them affairs where milady could reel her wash out of her apartment from the second floor window. There was a wash on the line. The lads tried to figure out how to get around this. One of them shook the pole and thought that it could be removed. The woman, a big fat heifer, started to shout: "Get away from my pole you bunch of bums." Pony tried to reason with her, telling her that they would wait until she hauled in her wash. But she said that she was going to put out another one the next day.



She said she would call a cop. The cop heard this and came back there and told them they couldn't remove the pole. So they messed around and came up with the idea of lacing her pole into the left rear lacing of the tent.

It started to rain that night and it rained all that night and all day the next day and was still at it early Sunday morning. The frost bitten leaves just showered down off the trees. But we did have two good houses. Due to the rain the British Jack did not fly off the poles. But that bull-headed woman's wet wash did.

There was a lot of action packed into that final week. I was watching myself as I knew that I had made some enemies. Recently I read Joe McKennon's book *Horse Dung Trail*, and in it he writes of the brutality of the circus. There is brutality in many walks of life, that is my opinion anyhow. It exists where ever a body of men are packed together for a time, such as lumber jacks, ranch hands, soldiers, sailors, gandy dancers and other iterant workers.

The worse case of brutality that I ever saw wasn't on a show but in a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp. Spring had come and the enlistments were up for about one third of the boys. I was one of them. I wanted to leave there real bad. My nerves were rubbed raw from being packed in tents and barracks with a bunch of baby faced kids. In the camp were groups of ethnics. They didn't meld together, but managed to get into barracks together. They were like a bunch of

mean dogs snarling at each other. There were ancient grudges brought over from across the seas and had been talked up by the parents of the boys. I had kept a low profile and thought that I got through that six months without making any enemies.

The last night that we spent together groups went from barracks to barracks evening up old scores. The officers must have expected something like that and didn't interfere. I tried to stay out of it.

There was a boy whose bunk was next to mine. He was just an old boy from somewhere. He wasn't a member of any particular ethnic group. About two nights before he had got into a fight and licked the other boy badly. He had put the boots to his opponent, walked all over him, lumber jack style.

After lights out I was laying on my bunk fully clothed, with my money in a grouch bag and my few things packed as right after breakfast we were to be hauled to the nearest railroad station. About six guys came in and jumped this lad next to me, held him down and was really working him over.

I couldn't stand it and got into it. There was merry hell around there for a few minutes. He and I together managed to drive them out into the dark.

The next morning there was a lot of beat up boys. Two who had been knifed were in the infirmary. For some reason the commanding officer singled me out and gave me authorization papers to buy tickets for us so we could leave. Not only that but I was to see that they got on the train and off at their home towns. My duty wasn't over until I had saw the last one safe in his home town. I told him I didn't want to do this. He said that it was a direct order and reminded me that I was still under the War Department until I got my discharge through the mail.

It took me two days of day coach travel and agony to get that lot safely home. Why he picked me out to shepherd them I'll never know. So, I think that circus workers are mild compared to some others.

Back along the route some place one evening the boys were huddled around a fire. Joe Clarke joined us. He started to talk about how he never saw so much misery and hard luck as the show had had. He said the only logical reason was that the trick was hoodooed. If so, there must be a Jonah with it. As he talked his eyes would slant over toward me and back to the boys.

They got to doing the same. I thought he was setting me up to be red lighted and I couldn't think what I had ever done to him to cause him to feel that way to-

ward me. I told him, "Joe I know what you are up to and you are not much of a man to stoop to such tactics and if you want we can settle this man to man right now." He just walked off. Then I told the boys "if any of you try anything on me at least one of you will go out of the car with me."

Capt. Irwin came up to me one day. He said, "I have heard that you don't like me, that you have been blowing your guts all over the show about me." I told him, "No, I don't like you, but have kept it to myself." He said, "Well I had a nice little purse of money to hand you at season's end. Now I won't give it to you." I told him to just go away. I didn't want his money.

Then there was one lady on the show that was out and out vindictive toward me. Her husband told me that she was always trying to get him to beat up on me. But that he wouldn't do it as he would be fighting all the time if she had her way. So I had reasons to be watchful those last few days.

Callander, Monday's town, wasn't much. There wasn't a matinee and quite a few of us went to see the Dionne quintuplets. It was worth the admission price to see them cute little girls.

In Huntsville biz picked up. We had two nice houses there. The weather had turned nice and warm. It was there that Capt. Irwin done one of the cruelest things that I had ever saw or heard of. He got to talking to an old one armed ex-sawmill and wood worker. He was on the bum. Capt. told him that he had a row of houses in Toronto and needed someone just like this gent to collect the rents and to make light repairs. He couldn't give him big wages but he would have a nice warm apartment. The poor fellow was overjoyed and said that he would beat his way to town if the Captain would give him the address. Capt. says "you won't need to do that, we will be in Toronto in the morning and you can ride the train down and I'll take you over and show you around. Then I'll have to leave as I am booked solid for the winter in the states. Mind you be here at midnight and I'll see you aboard. You will have to ride in that car," he pointed toward No. 7, "as the coach is full. But you won't mind that will you?" The poor fellow says "oh no of course not."

That evening Capt. went to Charlie the car loader and told him that an old one armed tramp was hanging around and that he was afraid he would try to bum his way with us. Kick him off, Capt. said. The man was down there when we got loaded and Charlie drove him off with curses. I had seen the poor old man from time to time during the day and had given him money for dinner and supper. But



I lacked the moral courage to tell him the truth.

The last week the show made some money as the weather was nice. The matinees were light, but the night shows were almost capacity. That area between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie is a fruit belt and as we hadn't seen any fruit all season we were delighted. Out on the plains there were Saskatoon berries and a small tree that had smaller apples and that's all we saw.

I think it was in Oakville that the cars were spotted along side of a fruit orchard. The ground was covered with wind falls. We went over the fence and was picking up some of the fruit. Some of the men came out with shot guns and swore at us, told us to drop what we had and to get back over the fence.

I though, my gawd, here is the land that I yearned to be in and what happens. I was sworn at and had guns pointed at me. I thought of them people out on the plains who didn't have much but were willing to share it. One morning in Manitoba an old fellow came on the lot carrying a pail full of them little red apples and gave them to us. He said he thought we would like to have some fruit to eat. It must have taken him a long time to have picked that pail full. And here fruit was rotting on the ground. It came to me that we were back east and would have to be more careful about trespassing. That incident in the fruit orchard made me see the difference in people and how friendly and out going those western people were.

One Saturday night in a little Alberta town one of the burrs had got lost off the prop wagon. Behind the blacksmith shop there was a yard full of old wagons and buggies. I took the wrench and went up there looking for a burr. I was striking

matches and a fellow came out of nowhere with a little light and said here maybe this will help you. I told him what I was looking for and we found one. I asked him if he knew where the smith was as I wanted to pay him something. He said "you are looking at him. But hell I don't want any money. A young fellow came in here looking for a burr for a buggy. He said he had brought his girl into the dance and sure wanted to get her back home by breakfast time. We helped him look and he found one."

Now back east I might have been arrested for trespassing and theft for just being there. Then the yard would have been posted and a fence around it with a mean dog on guard.

We had an awful time getting across the border. They just shoved us across on the Canadian side.

The train stopped in Niagara Falls, New York. Evidently the train crew thought it was going to be a short session and they would take us into Buffalo. But the officer in charge, a little shrimp, told them to put us on a siding. He was going to through this crummy pile of junk with a fine tooth comb. He started in rough shod on us, telling us that we were to unload it.

We refused. The fixer came by and he ordered us to unload it. We told him no. He said if we boys unload it they would have to load it back up. That was the law. The officer said he would be damned if his men would load it back up and we said we would be damned if we would unload it. He said we had better tread light. "I have a bad report on you and I have the authority to put you all in jail." We laughed at that and asked on what charges? He did go through the cars, but they gave us a hard time with the questions and answers. My home address was the same as it is now, Townville, Pennsylvania. The officer asked me, "What are you trying to pull, no one would name a place just Townville. You just made that up, didn't you?" I told him that there was such a place. He said "you are not a Dutchman. I think you are an Englishman. When did you leave England? What port did you come into Canada? And now you are trying to sneak into this country, aren't you?" I told him he was way off, that I was an American, that there was lots of people in Pennsylvania that wasn't Dutch and besides I was born near Stanford, Kentucky and if I had any accent it was a little bit Southern.

Little Red was grilled up as he gave his birth place as Little Cooley, Pennsylvania. They didn't buy that either. Pony Red was really grilled with that Irish accent. He really was an alien and was up to 1955 when he got his citizenship papers. But he lied his way through and they passed

him on. Willie Carter was drinking and got cute with them, speaking French. One officer told him that he knew that he was a southern jig otherwise he would be put back across the river. Elmer had come and straightened out Willie, asking him what to hell was the matter with him anyhow and assured the officer that Willie was an American.

We prevailed upon them two no-goods that had joined in Transcona to get off in the Toronto yards. Little Chief stayed with us to Niagara Falls, Ontario. He cried like a baby when he bid us good bye. I guess that was the best deal the poor fellow ever had. They were kind of harsh with Indians at that time in Canada.

They finally let us go. We were on the tail end of a long slow freight on the run into Buffalo. We were trundling along at about ten miles per hour through Tonawanda. All at once someone said, "why there is Chapman standing along the truck with his suit case." The fixer looked kind of woebegone. We figured that he had been tossed off, by who, we didn't know. The lads hollered out insults to him. He wasn't very popular. It was 1940 before I saw him again.

When we got into Buffalo we were hungry. It had been nearly twenty-four hours since we had ate. In Niagara Falls we had taken up a collection and entrusted it with Tommie and Pony to go up town and bring back some grub. We should have known better. They came back with some Cobbs Creek whiskey and no food, claiming that there were no stores open.

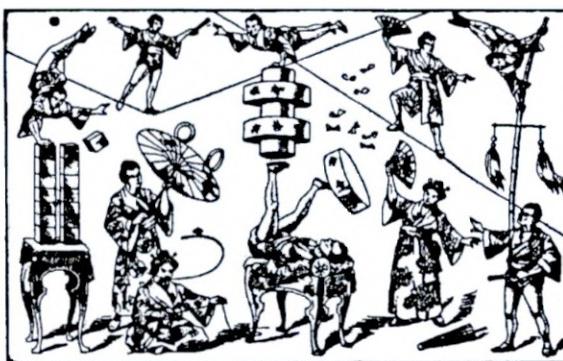
We were set on a siding near the passenger station in Buffalo for a time. Many people left there and there were more goodbyes. I was shaking hands with Charlie the porter. He showed me his grip. Some one had slit it open and poured ink all over his clothes and stuff. I'll never forget the misery in that black man's eyes. He didn't know who did it.

We were moved to another siding down in the yards. We understood that it would be two hours before we left for Dunkirk. So some of us thought that we would try to find a place to eat.

Pony Red, Little Red, Tommie, Popeye, Wagon Wheels, Tex, Hot Cakes and I started out. Hot Cakes was drunk as a lord. We went over the right of way fence and up into the town. The people we saw were strange looking, almost yellow complexion, high cheek bones, black eyes. The men had their heads shaved except for kind of a scalp lock. They seemed hostile toward us.

We went into a joint that we took for an eatery and sat down at the counter. My host, a big yellow bastard, didn't waste

any words of welcome. He asked, "What do booms vant? You got da mun eh?" We told him that we did. He wanted proof and told us to lay out thirty-five cents a piece in front of us. Cripes, he hadn't even told us what was on the menu as yet. All the money we had was Canuck. I even found two Newfoundland silver dollars and some British currency. None of us had a penny of American money. Elmer always paid us off in cash just the way he took it in. This bugger didn't like the looks of that money and insisted on us coughing up another dime. We did, but wasn't happy about it. He had one of those canvas change aprons on and start-



ed to rake it into it. Hot Cakes had laid out his coin. Popeye got cute and put Cakes' money under his hat. A joke, or so he thought. When the man got to Cakes he started to abuse the boy, asking in a rude fashion, "Where's da mun, you dirty boom?" Hot Cakes looked bewildered. He said, "It was right there." "You lie you boom you, you didn't have da mun." He back handed the lad right off the stool. Pony and Wagon Wheels jumped the counter and was giving the fellow old billy-o. All I could see was a fist going up and coming down. Someone tossed a chair through a window. Someone set fire to a waste paper basket. A big fat woman came in from the kitchen and took one look and ran out the front door screaming. When we got out in the street carrying Hot Cakes the place was full of screaming, howling rubes. They were swearing at us and biting their thumbs and other foolish things. Heck, if they wanted to fight why didn't they just wade in? And why all this commotion. The man got what he deserved.

Someone laughed and said let's leave old Hot Cakes to the rubes. Pony took command. He said, "No, we all came here together and we will all leave together." The stinking rubes was throwing anything that they could get their hands on at us. Two of the boys got Cakes in between them and we started up the street in sort of a ragged square. We were hampered somewhat because none of us would

strike a women. And they were the bravest and done us much harm.

The police and fire trucks were trying to get up the street but couldn't make any head way with the mob. We bulled our way up to the right of way fence. There stood one of them big uniformed New York Central bulls. He said "stop, where do you think you are going." We told him that we were with that show over in the yards. He asked what set the bloody scum off. We didn't know. He said we better make a run for it as the train was pulling out, and sure enough the two cars was right ahead of the caboose and it was starting to move. The bull fired two shots over the heads of the mob and said, "Run for it, I'll hold them back."

But Pony balked. He didn't think it was right or fitting for an Irishman to run and made a long speech or it would have been long, but someone knocked him cold. We gathered up the two bodies and just barely made the train.

To go back a bit. A few years before the New York Central had made up its mind to declare war on Knights, box car robbers and traveling gangs of thugs on their main line. They recruited police from Northern Ireland, professional cops. They were all big men and hard looking with thick brogues. It was enough to make one's heart skip a beat to encounter one of them on a dark night down in the yards.

It was after dark when we arrived in Dunkirk. There we were to be shifted off the mainline and over into the yards of the Central's Valley Branch for the run down to Warren. Little Red and I decided to go into town and try to buy some food at a store. We dropped out of the car right into the arms of one of them big bulls. He wouldn't let us leave, saying he had got a bad report on us from Buffalo. He poured on the oil saying, "My, my, who would think that a couple of nice looking lads like you would go about fighting in the streets and setting fires to buildings, my, my." We told him we didn't know anything about it as we had been asleep when we went through Buffalo. It was a good story and we struck to it. "The lads in Buffalo feel they owe you a vote of thanks anyway for trying to burn out that bunch of box car pilferers, but it is sad to tell you the fire fizzled out."

We were shifted over into the Valley Branch yards. Red and I took up a collection and started toward the town to get some grub. Some of the other boys followed along behind us, just in case there was any trouble. The town was a tough place in those days. We came out on a street corner. Right across the way was a Polish neighborhood store. We took it for

that anyhow. All the advertising on the window was Polish this and Polish that.

Red and I started across. The other boys stayed where they were. For some reason I glanced back and after all these years I can still see them standing there with hungry faces and I felt a stab of pity for them. We had all been through an awful lot together.

When we got where we could see into the store, there was old Capt. Irwin in there gassing away with the clerk. We hesitated because we didn't know what he might say or do. But we braced ourselves and went in. The clerk, a big fat fellow, got hostile the second he saw us. He hollered out, "Vot you bums vant?" I felt like driving my fist into his big mouth. I told him what we wanted. "You got monney?" Yes. "Let me see do money." I asked him, for cripes sake, what in hell did he want. Just then old Capt. stuck in his oar, "Why sir, surely you wouldn't take monney from these poor lads, would you? They have been cooped up in a horse car for four days with nothing to eat." The clerk said that was tough, but he still wanted to see our money.

Just then a big fat woman came bursting in shouting, "Call the cops, call the cops, there is a gang of outers hanging around across the street. You ought to seen them give me the old eye as I walked past." Then she screamed, "Dey want my body." I had to sneer at that. Old Capt. gave a wicked laugh. This old devil was in his second heaven. He even danced a jig. He said, "Duffy lads." We all ran out the door. The clerk had made a lunge for the phone and Red hit him from behind driving his face up against the mouth piece. The woman was screaming her head off. Old Capt., for all his seventy some odd years, sure could run. He went past the boys on the corner. He said, "It's Duffy time lads."

We got back into the car all right. A few minutes later we were south bound. I'll bet the hobo jungles and flop houses in Dunkirk were raided that night. I don't suppose that many people knew of our brief lay over in their fair city.

I thought that we would wake up in North Warren and I could surely imagine myself going down Jackson Street to a coffee shop that opened early. When I did wake up I felt we were not in North Warren because I could hear saws running and could smell a bakery. I jumped down and sure enough we were spotted on the house track back of the Central depot on the corner of 4th and Laurel in Warren. Up the street was the Warren Chair Company and across Laurel was the Anderson Bakery. I hustled across to the bakery. Boy I could smell fresh donuts. I knew the donut maker, a man named "Snuffy." He

worked all night alone in a little cement block building. I went in there and he asked me "where in hell did you come from? You look like hell."

He had a pot of coffee on a hot plate and I sat there eating donuts, drinking coffee and listening to his tales of all the rich, beautiful blondes he had seduced since he saw me last. I thought, my, my, all the time I was mucking about up in Canada old Snuffy has been having a wonderful time and vowed that I would never troupe again.

I went into the bakery proper and bought a box of left overs for fifty cents and took them back to the boys. We didn't know what to do as we thought that we would unload in North Warren and stow the stuff in the barn.

About 8 a. m. Elmer and D. C. Hawn showed up, both full of the old go, telling us to get with it and that we were to unload it there and the teams would haul it up to the barn. Elmer didn't give any reason for this. He and Hawn sat on a pile of ties and looked on and spoke of how slow we were.

I was burning up at both of them, Hawn for renting lots way out in the boondocks when he could have had a railroad lot right downtown and for booking us into some of them gawd awful spots and Elmer for not making any provisions to feed us on the home run. I thought about how he wanted Little Red and I to red light all the boys except Willie in Buffalo. He had said he didn't want that scum in his home town.

We were indignant and refused him. Most of us had stuck and hung on for him and he owed money to some of us, and some had hopes of a bonus.

There they sat, them two, bathed, clean looking, and I'll bet that they didn't miss any meals on the home run. Hawn had the rep of a bucko lad. He was big and two fisted. He had the rep of moving a show on and off faster than any known man. Elmer was big and tough and had been known to beat up men and to toss them off the lot.

It was a five mile round trip and the teams made about three trips a piece. The light plant wagon and the seats were left in the car. The cars were to be hauled down to the Warren Tank Car yards at Starbrick. Texas Joe and Marion was to live in the car all that coming winter.

When we got everything stowed away in the barn Dick came out and paid us off. No Bonus. Red and I went over to the coffee shop and Elmer and Hawn was in there. They were both real congenial and asked us to sit down with them.

Elmer told us that he wanted us back early the next spring as he was figuring on a much bigger show. He wanted Red for the boss hostler and he would have two, four and six horse hitches. And he was going to do something for me, either the train master or boss of props, because Curley and Charlie both had let him down more than once during the season. He wanted Joe Robinson back as he was a good builder and a good man. And he would have at least two bulls, maybe more for Willie to handle.

So the season, despite everything, must have been a winner.

But it all came to naught. Elmer was a compulsive gambler and he was dead broke by spring. He couldn't have been a crooked one as he nearly always lost. He had a good rep for paying his debts and he could always borrow to put out a show. But by 1937 a lot of men were either dead or broke themselves, out of touch, or out of the business. By March of 1937 I think he would have settled for a two car show, but didn't have the money to put it out. I guess Dick didn't want to back him up either.

#### HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

In honor of the celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the birth of the American Circus, we have arranged for the re-publication of:

#### ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN CIRCUS

#### VOLUME I

1793-1829

by Stuart Thayer

First published in 1976 and long out of print, this new edition (with some corrections and additions) is still the most comprehensive history of the first thirty-seven years of the American circus ever published.

The pioneers of the ring, John Bill Ricketts, Victor Peppin, Jean Breschard, Philip Lailson and their troupes, their programs and their travels appear here as do the early American proprietors Nathan Howes, Aaron Turner, Price & Simpson, J. Purdy Brown and all the others.

If the beginnings of the tented circus, the movements of the circus into the West, the fires and fights and triumphs of the early company's interest you, then this is the book in which to read about them.

Paperbound, 5"x 8", 8 illustrations, 240 pages. \$30 (postpaid) from the author.

Stuart Thayer  
430 17th Avenue East  
Seattle, WA 98112  
Edition limited to 250 copies.

Sells & Rentfrow's Monster Museum, 3-Ring Circus and Great Double Menagerie opened the season of 1893 on April 8, at Chattanooga, Tennessee, where it had spent the winter.

Jasper N. Rentfrow was a producer of stage shows who had joined Willie Sells in 1892 when the Sells & Rentfrow circus was created. In all probability the circus was the property of Allen Sells, the adoptive father of Willie. Allen sold his interests in the Sells Brothers' Circus in 1882 to his brothers and retired to Topeka, Kansas, where he described himself as "Capitalist."

Sells & Rentfrow, in 1893, made an extensive tour of the United States exhibiting in Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Texas, and Oklahoma Territory.

The first Kansas date was May 26, at Weir.

An advertisement and a handout appeared in the May 19 Weir *Journal*. The handout dealt in vague generalities, but the advertisement, which was used repeatedly, named several performers in a text greater in length than most handouts. Side-by-side with the advertisement was a handout extolling the features to be seen with Ringling Bros.' World's Greatest Shows when it played Pittsburg on May 22, only ten miles from Weir on the Frisco railroad.

Sells & Rentfrow's ad stated, "You can't afford to miss seeing the World's Fair on wheels. The most extraordinary of principals. Bareback equestrian Mr. Wm. Sells.

"WM. SELLS, a veritable living centaur; a paragon among all horsemen. None dare to challenge his supremacy; the pride of America; the wonder of Europe, who for over three continuous months was the popular hero at Olympia, London; received the most enthusiastic recognition from Royalty, Nobility and commoners, and was unanimously recognized by the British press as the pre-eminent feature of the circus in which he shown.

"MR. W. M. DUTTON, in his brilliant feats of Equestrianism, performing at will forward and backward somersaults on the bare back of his swiftly running steed. One of the most dashing Equestrains (sic) of the age, engaged at an enormous salary to ride at each performance of this faultless exhibition.

"MR. CHAS. WATSON, the greatest horse rider the world ever saw.

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING Prodigal Profusion Of Princely Paraphernalia

Vol. I, Chapter Two, Part One, 1893  
By Orin Copple King

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"The DUTTON SISTERS, undoubtedly the finest lady riders on earth.

"Miss Mildred Murray, the finest Menagerie (sic) Rider. Edgar Wilkinson, the celebrated European Hurdle Rider. The Great Livingston Family, 4 in number—Aerialists, Gymnastes, Acrobats and Bicyclists in sensational Aerial Flights, dazzling and intrepid feats. Fearless and astonishing features that heretofore have seemed impossible accomplished by these wonderful artists with such ease and grace as to establish them the undisputed champions of the Gymnastic World, and fifty other performers from every clime.

"Two menageries of wild Beasts and open dens of savage brutes. Mammoth Elephants, Lions, Tigers, Hyenas, Bears, Wolves, Leopards and Panthers. Zebra's trained to drive like horses. Knights in

William Dutton, featured rider with Sells & Rentfrow in 1893. Pfening Archives.



Armor, Male and Female Jockeys, Squadrons of princes, Nobles and Cavalier in Royal robes and Rich Costumes, mounted on Spirited Horses like days of old.

"The best performing Elephants; Sea Lion, Leopard and baby Camel; 20 great circus Acts; three great bands in street parade. Courly Knights and Dames; a drove of monster Camels, Zebras, Bears and baby Monkeys; dens and Lairs. See the twenty clowns. First in wit; first in fun; first in the hearts of the public.

"A Mile Tumble from the Skies. Grand balloon race and double parachute jump by Miss Annie Bell Holton and Miss Lillie Rice. To be witnessed positively at show grounds."

The ad closed with a truthful statement that, "You all know us, our past record a guarantee of the future." Willie maintained his guarantee, for all of his shows kept to the same standards of sharp practices and thievery.

The Weir *Journal* made no comment after the show had come and gone.

A handout in the Cherryvale *Champion* perpetuated an old canard when it stated that, "Through an arrangement between the proprietors of the leading shows of the country, the Sells & Rentfrow's Enormous Railroad Shows, which will appear in Cherryvale on May 27 will be the only tented exhibition of any importance that will visit this section of the country this year."

Willie's uncles, the famous Sells brothers, were angered and embarrassed by Willie linking the Sells name with the worst kinds of graft and by Willie's efforts to create the impression that his show was the Sells Bros.' Big Show of the World. In the spring of 1893, the Sells brothers sent a circular to nearly every newspaper in Kansas concerning Willie's abuse of the public.

The Cherryvale *Champion* reported that, "We have a circular from Sells Brothers, proprietors of the great Sells Circus in which they denounce the Sells & Rentfrow Show which exhibited here last Saturday, as a fraud traveling on the reputation of Sells Brothers and using their advertising matter. They also say that a gang of confidence men are with this show; a fact that some of our citizens can testify to."

The advertisement used at Weir was certainly not stolen from the Sells Brothers' press department. The Sells Brothers never used anything as poorly written as Willie's ad.

In another column the *Champion* claimed, "There was a precious lot of fa-

kirs and thieves on the show grounds Saturday and several persons got relieved of their surplus funds. The man who tries to beat the fakir puts himself on the same level and is no better than the man he tries to beat and deserves no sympathy when he gets left."

"One of the worst gangs of thieves that ever visited Elk City came in with Sells & Rentfrows show Monday [May 29]," according to the Elk City *Enterprise*. "The side show tent was their headquarters and the unsophisticated visitors who bit at their games were robbed without mercy. Mr. Byfield, living near La Fontaine, lost \$140, one of the thieves snatching it from his hands and disappearing in the crowd. He afterward pointed out a man as the guilty party who was arrested by Deputy Sheriff Brace and arraigned before Justice Davidson. He was bound over in the sum of \$1,000, but the gang paid Mr. Byfield his money back and also paid the costs, amounting to \$25, and the man was released."

The *Enterprise* further reported that, "The town was crowded with people, but are inclined to think that most of them came simply to see the elephant and look at the tent as not more than one fourth of them went inside the canvas. While there are, perhaps, better shows traveling, it was a very good exhibition and those who attended were not disappointed. Just before dark, when the wind had lulled a little, the balloon was sent up, the aeronaut jumping from it and descending in a parachute after it had traveled about a mile."

The *Enterprise* thought the balloon ascension was "worth more than all the balance of the show."

A visit to the circus frequently resulted in a life long memory. A group of Elk City boys were so greatly impressed with the tattooed man in the side show that they determined to decorate their own bodies. They chipped in and bought a stick of lunar caustic.

"They applied it cautiously at first to see if it would hurt," the *Enterprise* reported, June 9, and finding there was no pain connected with it, stripped off their clothing and proceeded to daub their bodies copiously. They drew rude and uncouth pictures of doves and other emblems, wrote initials (their own and, perhaps, some others) on various parts of their anatomy, and then went home to await the results. They are just now getting the results. Wherever the caustic touched the skin it has come off, and they are the sorest crowd of boys that ever took their dinner standing. But that is not the worst of it. Their bodies will be covered with unseemly welts and scars which they will carry to the grave."

Memorial Day, May 30, was always an

awkward time for circuses in the last years of the 19th Century. The public felt strongly that it was a hallowed day, one to be honored in solemnity. The Grand



William Sells, renegade circus owner.  
Pfenning Archives.

Army of the Republic considered any frivolity to be an insult to their fallen comrades.

The Howard *Courant* expressed the community sentiment on May 19: "It is unfortunate for the proper observance of Decoration day that the circus should strike this point on the 30th. But our people will see that due honor is shown the memory of the heroic dead, notwithstanding."

A week later the *Courant* stated its position even more strongly. "No patriotic person will allow a circus--especially one he knows not of--to hinder him from paying the honor due our heroic dead by the proper observance of Memorial Day. Go to the cemetery; strew flowers on the graves of the dead; attend the exercises in the afternoon; hear the memorial oration; listen to the program the G. A. R. post will carry out--and if you must go to the circus, go in the evening."

The *Courant* reported the events of Memorial Day as follows: "The rain the night before and during the forenoon of Memorial Day considerably interfered with the program, but the day was a grand success in Howard, nevertheless. The forenoon program was entirely discontinued. At half past one in the afternoon the Howard Band marched down from their room and gave the crowds on the streets some of their best marches and quicksteps, then headed the procession of the G. A. R.'s and W. R. C.'s [Women's Relief Corps] from their hall to the court house. After a dirge by the band, Prof. J.

W. Shively made a fifteen minutes' address--and it was a good one; then the band played a funeral march, and Hon. J. Beckman of Arkansas City, was introduced and delivered the oration of the day. Rarely have our people ever been permitted to listen to a better or more eloquent speech than Mr. Beckman made, and he held his vast audience spellbound for three quarters of an hour.

The Howard High School Quartette was to have furnished some singing, but an organ was not furnished them so the singing had to be omitted."

Escorted by the Kansas National Guard the crowd moved to the cemetery and decorated the graves of the fallen.

As for Sells & Rentfrow's exhibition, the *Courant* observed that, "The circus Tuesday was a rather small affair. It was not very well advertised, and their claim for a 'mammoth railroad show' was in the nature of a joke, for the menagerie was hardly visible to the naked eye. The circus performance was very good--what there was of it. No gambling attachments showed up in Howard, but the fact that our peace officers were laying for them with legal processes ready made out to nab them the minute they should open up with any 'game,' caused them to cease their labors during their stay in Howard. Willie Sells, who advertised himself as 'the man who rides,' should change his ad to 'the man who does not ride,' for he did not make his appearance except in citizen's clothes. He's too fat to ride anything but an omnibus, any way. The show didn't make any money in Howard, though as far as we can hear they paid all their bills, and made no trouble with anybody. They went from here to Eureka."

It was a rowdy bunch of hooligans that traveled with Sells & Rentfrow. The exhibitions at Eureka on May 31, were remembered only for the insults bestowed on the public.

The *Democratic Messenger* reported that, "Will Cutmyer smashed a fellow's face circus evening for making an improper remark in the presence of the young lady that Will was escorting. From all that we can learn about the matter Cutmyer served the fellow right."

"A man who gave McGinney as his name, an attache of the circus," according to the *Eureka Herald*, "was arrested Wednesday evening charged with insulting Miss Laswell. He was taken before Judge Martindell and, pleading his quilt, was fined \$5 and costs."

The *Messenger* reported McGinney's fine as \$10.

The Emporia *Gazette*, concerning circus day June 1, reported that, "Sells & Rentfrow's circus gave their exhibition last night to a large audience. The performance was very pleasing and em-



braced some of the very best specialties upon the road. The menagerie is scant, but taken as a circus they have a very good little show."

The Emporia *Daily Republican* related that, "W. H. Shoper, who lives north of Americus, was in yesterday and sued William Sells for \$13.50 for labor with the circus last year.

"Sells is the bareback rider who was not present. Upon investigation it was found that he had nothing here to levy on, consequently the attachment did not attach."

The important phrase is "he had nothing here to levy on," and this should be remembered in regard to Willie's future trials, tribulations and nefarious schemes.

The June 2 *Gazette* had additional legal news concerning the show: "The Sells & Rentfrow show which was here yesterday, has been sued for \$30,000 damages by the Sells Brothers, who claim that Sells & Rentfrow are injuring the original Sells' circus by representing that they are the Sells' show. Sells Brothers are the uncles of William Sells, of Sells & Rentfrow."

At Cottonwood Falls, where the show appeared June 2, there occurred a well-planned swindle. The *Chase County Leader*, Cottonwood Falls, revealed the scheme: "An Old Man Robbed by Showmen.

"E. Regle, living on South Fork, about four miles southeast of this city, was robbed of \$868.00 by a gang of thieves connected with or traveling with the Sells & Rentfrow show. During the progress of the parade, about 10 o'clock Friday morning, the old gentleman, while strolling towards the show ground, was accosted by a stranger, who asked him if he had any horses to sell. Replying in the negative, the stranger then asked him if he knew of a farm in the vicinity for sale, to which he replied in the affirmative. By the time they reached the show ground another man appeared and all fell to talking about land. While thus engaged No. 3 stepped up and greeting No. 1, they fell into an animated conversation from which it was inferred that No. 1 owned a ranch somewhere in the state and dealt extensively in cattle; that Nos. 1 and 3 were old acquaintances but had not met each other in a long time. To the inquiry of No. 1, No. 3

The Sells & Rentfrow bandwagon. The Fielding wagon had been on the John O'Brien, Batcheller & Doris, Doris & Colvin and Sam McFlinn shows previously. It was last on Campbell Bros. Pfening Archives.

replied that he was one of the managers of the show and invited the party into the side show. While viewing the sights No. 1 stated that he was anxious to hire a good reliable man to post and distribute bills for the show, and asked Mr. Regle how he would like the job. Mr. R. thought he would like the job if it paid. He was assured that it paid four hundred dollars a month, but the man employed must be a responsible man, one who could put up security, or who had a certain financial standing. Regle then exhibited a certificate of deposit from the national bank for \$800 and \$48 accrued interest. The showman admitted that the certificate might be all right, but he would rather see the money. Regle went at once to the bank, drew the \$848 with which, together with \$20 that he had with him, he returned to the side show and handed it to the stranger to examine. The latter at once disappeared and before Mr. Regle recovered from his surprise the other two men surrounded him, expressing their sorrow for the shabby treatment and assured him they would make it all right. They then wrote a note for \$868, payable in ten days, gave it to Mr. Regle and they too disappeared. Mr. Regle could not realize that he had been the victim of sharpers and waited until late in the afternoon before he made his loss known. A search for the thieves at that late hour, of course, proved fruitless."

Early in the morning of June 3 the streets of Newton began to "fill up," as the *Weekly Republican* put it, and by ten o'clock standing room was at a premium. The *Republican* commented that, "The parade was not a long one, but what there was of it was quite good. The crowd was just as big as it would have been if the procession had been the advertised mile in length."

The evening performance, according to the *Republican*, presented a program that was not on the bills: "THE WIND STORM.--There was a large number of

badly scared people in town Saturday night. The wind came up with a terrific velocity, and great clouds of dust and sand swept down Main street until people began to think it was dangerous to be there. At the circus grounds there was great excitement. The freaks rushed out of the side-show tent and the fat woman and living skeleton and the Fejee Islanders all assisted in holding down the guy ropes to the huge canvas pavilion. The snake-charmer was nearly run over by a cage that the wind careened near the tent. The roof of the big tent was hastily taken down, not, however, until it had been torn considerably. About 9 o'clock the wind subsided and the band wagon made a trip through Main street and it was announced that the show would take place as usual. About 100 people gathered at the tent and a performance of an hours length was given."

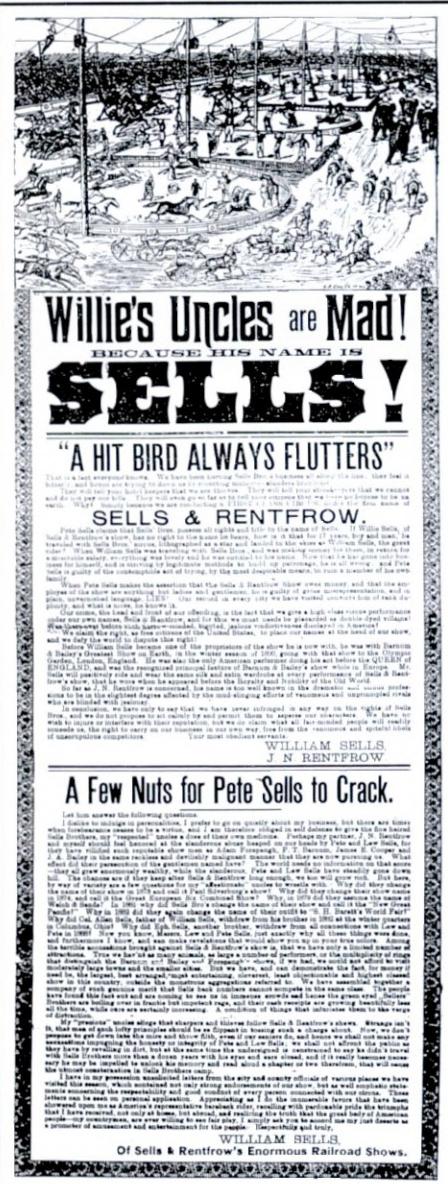
The gamblers were active at Sterling on June 5. Joe Elliott and Arthur Snooks discovered a way to beat the shell game, or so they thought. The story as told by the *Weekly Champion* stated that the two men "drew fifty or sixty dollars from the Citizens Bank and went out to the show grounds loaded for bear. They did not remain there very long--no, not after they had lost their money; the tiger's claws had been sharpened anew just for their benefit. Arthur's nose, after the fight, was sufficient evidence of this fact. Farmer Littler is another of the Simon Cutters who think they know it all, and tell just exactly how the thing is done--but he missed his calculations this time to the extent of \$60 or \$70. Last week the CHAMPION warned its readers against these paper there they shell workers, and had this unfortunate trio been readers of our they would not now be lamenting the loss of their money. But there are suckers and suckers, and the older they grow the more readily they bite. Read more and bite less, boys."

In another column, "We heard of another case of an old man who knew just how he could beat 'that fellow with the little shells.' He came down town and wanted to borrow \$300 at the First National Bank, but the president found out what he wanted it for and refused to accommodate him. So the old man woke up Tuesday morning \$300 better off."

And, "One young man who was acting the part of a Paul Dry by peeping under the canvas of the ladies' dressing room at the circus last Monday night, had a head put on him by one of the employees."

The Peeping Tom story is the first report of the kind to be found in the Kansas press, although unreported happenings surely occurred.

The Dodge City *Times*, concerning the exhibitions of June 7, carried a similar tale: "Judge Howe came very near being



clothing was a corset. The boys were so frightened they could not find their way out for a half hour."

"It is true," the *Democrat* acknowledged, "they paid for their ad and gave us all the 'comps' we asked for, but they promised a good show and circus, and gave us an outfit of bums, thieves and street walkers to watch."

The reports cited above are the only such accounts found in 13 years of circus research. All, it will be noted, occurred with Sells & Rentfrow. Willie wanted money and he was not particular how it came. Was Willie marketing some of the circus girls? Was Willie running a canvas brothel? It would not be out of character for Willie Sells.

Sells & Rentfrow was not a show to neglect short changing. The Garden City *Imprint* noted that, "The men belonging to the fourth class snide of a circus that done the people here Thursday [June 8] were a set of thieves or at least some of them were. Wherever it was possible in making change for tickets they failed to return the proper amount. Complaint was made to the Sheriff about it, and W. T. Eggen called on the outfit and secured about forty dollars of the money that had been fraudulently taken from different persons. Look out for this snide affair as it goes west."

The Garden City *Herald* and the Garden City *Sentinel* both agreed with the *Imprint* that Sells & Rentfrow was a gang of thieves. The *Sentinel* reported burglaries of several homes.

"Mathew McClerkin's house was entered by means of a window and several suites of clothes carried away, other places were entered but full particulars cannot be learned in time for publication."

All papers commented on the gambling.

According to the *Sentinel*, "Not a single disturbance on the streets. Only one fight was reported during the day."

According to the sentinel, Not a single arrest was by made the marshal or his deputies, Thursday, nor were any drunken or disorderly people seen on the streets."

The *Herald* reported that, "Nine of the Sells & Rentfrow's circus were taken into the Knights of Pythias lodge here, last Thursday night."

The nicest part of circus day in Garden City occurred before the evening show: "The train from the west Thursday," according to the *Herald*, "was late and arrived here just in time to see the balloon ascension and parachute jump. Several hundred people got off the cars and had a splendid view of the whole show."

The *Sentinel* reported that "The balloon



The other side of the Sells & Rentfrow  
rat sheet. Circus World Museum.

ascension afforded a beautiful sight to many of our citizens, Thursday evening. The air was calm and the balloon ascended straight upward several hundred feet, when the intrepid aeronaut cut loose and started for terra firma with his parachute. He landed only a short distance from where he started and the balloon came down near the M. E. church."

The thieves and gamblers spared the people of Syracuse, Friday, June 9, because of "excellent police regulations," the *Journal* reported. "There are no 'shell games' going on in a town where John Barbee is marshal."

Female performers were frequently condemned by the press as being more naked than they needed to be, and the posturing of the goddess on the big white horse pointing one foot to Heaven and the other straight to Hell was sinful indeed.

It did not escape the attention of the *Journal* that, "Just a single 'diaper' makes up a pretty scanty wardrobe even for this hot weather, but it's about all the female 'circusers' had time to put on Friday night. And we could only sit and ponder.

which bordered on the east side of Topeka, had a large auditorium which Willie believed would be ideal for the show. The 18 cages Willie carried could all be placed on the stage and the arena floor could be used for limited performances. The only drawback was the lack of heat, a problem which was solved with the installation of a very large heating stove.

The season of 1893 closed December 7, in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, and the show arrived in Topeka, December 9, via the Rock Island. The horses, wagons and other equipment were taken to Allen Sells' farm at the eastern edge of Topeka, a site now occupied by Kansas Correctional Diagnostic facility for criminals being sent to the State's various prisons.

Quartered on the auditorium stage according to the Topeka *State Journal* were, "Thirteen monkeys, two of them of a large species. Two hyenas (one of the 'grave-digger' variety), 1 leopard, 2 leopard cats, 6 ostriches, 2 black bears (tiger-faced, from India), 2 big lions and 1 tiger from Africa (sic), 1 camel with two humps, 2 dromedaries with one hump, 1 elephant, 4 badgers, 2 white Asian parrots, 2 Indian antelopes, 1 gorilla."

**TWO MEN**  
AN OPEN DAY  
IN A ZOO  
BY CHARLES BRIGGS  
ROBERT ASHDURST

J. L. Closson had charge of the menagerie.

The *Journal* reported in November that the show, according to Willie, "had a very fair season considering the times, and are well pleased with it. We have been in the west most of the time, and as far west as California. For the last few months we have been playing in the southern states, and have met with good success."

The *Journal*, in an interview in December with Rentfrow, the show's manager, related that, "The circus has traveled 50,000 (sic) miles the last season, and has met with wonderful success. The general manager said today [December 9] that the circus finished the year's business with \$85,000 ahead of expenses." Was the profit exaggerated as much as the mileage? One must remember that Rentfrow was no more honest than Willie.

The show had scarcely arrived in Topeka when suits were filed against it. Lawyer Ed McKeever saw the horses being removed to the Sells farm and was reminded of a client's claim against Willie: "He at once hastened to Justice Furry's court," the *Journal* reported the day of the show's arrival, "and ordered an execution issued on the show to cover the unpaid judgment. This judgment was in favor of C. H. Burt, of Beloit, and it amounts to \$78 and interest. When the show was at Beloit, May 6, 1890, a blown date for Sells & Andress. Burt furnished the billboards and advertising crew, for which he has not been paid."

Willie somehow avoided paying the

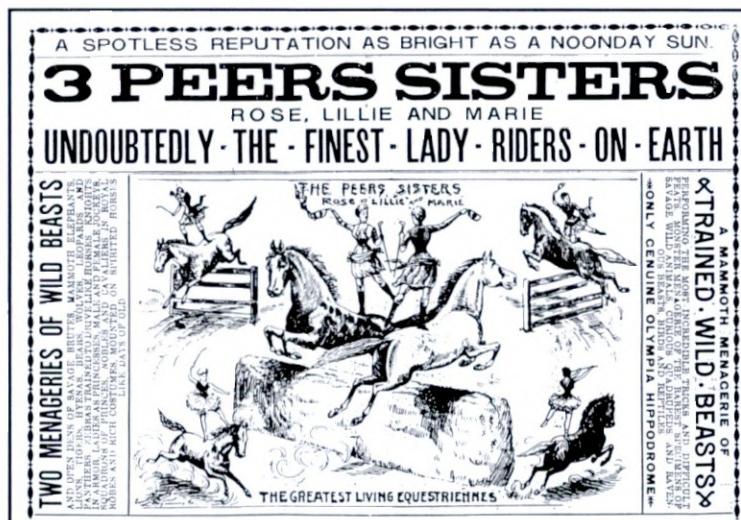


Illustration from a Sells & Rentfrow herald. Circus World Museum collection.

judgment and on December 29, 1898, the sheriff of Shawnee county returned to the court the order of execution "totally unsatisfied." Case 16043, District Court of Shawnee County.

Two performers, W. H. Miles and Josie Miles, filed a civil suit in Justice Furry's court on December 12, to recover \$180 due each of them on their salaries.

The most interesting suit was that filed by the "Boa Constrictor Man," Everett Sylvester, contortionist. The *Journal* carried the story December 12: "Everett Sylvester, the human boa constrictor, one of the attractions of the enormous Sells & Rentfrow shows, says he would like to have the balance of his salary for the season's work which still remains unpaid.

"Contortionist Sylvester says: 'I saw in the JOURNAL that the Sells show had made \$85,000 from this season's business. If they made that much money I would like to know who has it, for I haven't been paid my share, and the manager, Mr. Rentfrow, has been trying to settle with all the employees for 65 cents on the dollar.'

"He wanted to settle with me on that basis the night the show came in here. I took what money he offered, but I did not sign a receipt in full, and I would like to have the \$12.65 which is due me on my salary.

'They don't owe me very much, but the musicians and some of the performers are back several months wages. I have been in this business ten years, and this is the first time I ever got left.

"I joined the show in San Francisco. I made careful investigation and all the performers told me the show was all right. They were then paid every week. They said the show was ahead \$30,000 at that time on the season's work.

"After I joined them in October the show did a big business through lower California, sometimes giving as many as three performances a day. The business was 'bum' all through Texas, and poor up to the close of the season at Kingfisher.

"The show generally had about 50 work hands, but they kept dropping them out until the last three weeks there were not over twenty-five, including canvas men and razor backs altogether, and we performers had to hustle out every morning and help raise the canvas.

"The night the show closed at Kingfisher most of the work hands were fired off the train, some of them got \$1, some 50 cents, and some got nothing.

"Most of the performers and musicians thought the show was all right and let their wages stand, as they wanted a roll to fall back on when the season closed. There are a lot of us down at the Carter house on East Fourth street that wish we had our pay. Rentfrow, the manager, is the man we hired to and we have been looking to him for our pay, but the pay hasn't come."

Willie Sells in 1893 was a lawyers delight. In January Willie filed suit against his uncles, Ephraim, Lewis and Peter Sells, owners of the large Sells Brothers' circus.

"Plaintiff alleges that in April 1890, he entered into a contract with Sells Bros., and for his services he was to receive \$100 per week, which they failed to give him. He did not draw any salary for thirty weeks, and now sues to recover \$3,000 with interest."

On June 4, 1893, Ephraim, Peter and Lewis Sells filed a suit in the District Court of Shawnee County [case 15137] against William A. Sells and William

Lewis Sells filed a suit in the District Court of Shawnee County [case 15137] against William A. Sells and William (Willie) Sells. The plaintiffs' petition was largely devoted to praising the Sells Bros.' show and belittling Willie's aggregations. In summation the Sells brothers, by their attorneys, Douthitt, Jones and Mason, claimed: "Plaintiffs further say that they were put to great expense and trouble in trying to correct the false and injurious impression and belief purposely created by the defendants that plaintiffs' show had gone out of business and had been consolidated and merged into that of the defendants, and plaintiffs allege that they were compelled to and did expend the sum of five thousand dollars in trying to correct this error, and that the plaintiffs were damaged in the sum of five thousand dollars."

The petition continued by claiming that Willie's actions had cost the plaintiffs an extra \$5,000 in printing expenses. Another expense of \$10,000 was claimed for re-routing the Sells Brothers' show to avoid territory befouled by Willie's show.

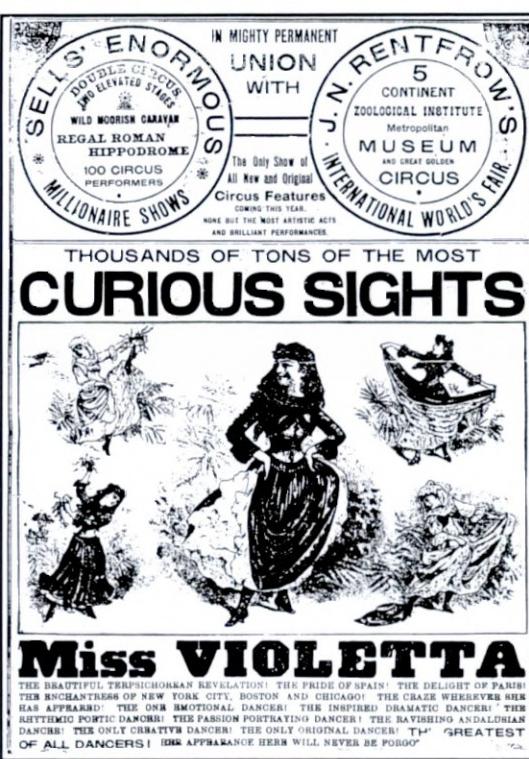
"Plaintiffs say that by reason of the premises hereinbefore averred they have been greatly damaged and injured in their said business and in the value of their said property in the further sum of thirty thousand dollars.

"Wherefore plaintiffs demand judgment against said defendants William A. Sells and William Sells for the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars their damages so as aforesaid sustained, and for costs of suit."

Among the charges set out in the plaintiffs' petition was the allegation that when Allen sold his interest in the circus to his brothers in 1882 for \$40,000, he promised "not to enter upon or have an interest in the circus or menagerie business again. That the said agreement on the part of said William A. Sells so made as aforesaid at the time of said sale was a part of the consideration that induced these plaintiffs to purchase said interest in said circus and show property . . ." So said the said attorneys of the said plaintiffs.

A. Bergen, attorney for Allen, countered with a motion to make the plaintiffs' petition definite and certain. Willie's attorneys, Eugene Hagan and David Overmeyer, filed a similar motion.

Bergen wanted to know "whether it is an action upon an agreement of William A. Sells not to enter the circus business again, or for the many other alleged wrongs." Was the contract between Allen and his brothers verbal or written? If written, Bergen wanted a copy. If oral, what was the date there of? Bergen wanted the facts constituting the manner, means and methods adopted by the defendants in or-



Top part of a herald used by Sells & Rentfrow in 1893. Circus World Museum collection.

der to make the fraudulent use of the name of the plaintiffs in conducting defendants' alleged show business." Bergen wanted copies of the specific advertising matter which the defendants infringed upon and copied extensively.

Bergen demanded that the plaintiffs be required "... to state by whom and when and where the alleged representations that the defendants' show was Sells Brothers' show were made."

In November the court granted only one of Bergen's motions, reference to Allen's agreement with his brothers was deleted from the plaintiffs' petition. And there the case rested.

The *Journal* reported on July 13 that Eugene Hagan had secured an injunction against Sells Brothers, to prevent them further interfering with the Sells & Rentfrow show.

"At one town in Wisconsin," the *Journal* continued, "Sells Brothers are charged with having written letters announcing that Willie Sells' name was not Sells and that he had appropriated the name

and was imposing on the public."

When the authentic Sells Brothers' Enormous United Railroad Shows played Independence on September 8 the ads carried in the *South Kansas Tribune* there contained the following "(N. B.-Sells Bros., are not connected in any way with an alleged circus and menagerie traveling under the name of Sells & Rentfrow."

The Kansas dates of 1893 for Sells & Rentfrow's Colossal Aggregation of Sensational Features, Monster Museum, 3 Ring Circus and Great Double Menagerie were: May 26, Weir City; May 27, Cherryvale; May 29, Elk City; May 30, Howard; May 31, Eureka; June 1, Emporia; June 2, Cottonwood Falls; June 3, Newton; June 5, Sterling; June 6, St. John; June 7, Dodge City; June 8, Garden City; June 9, Syracuse.

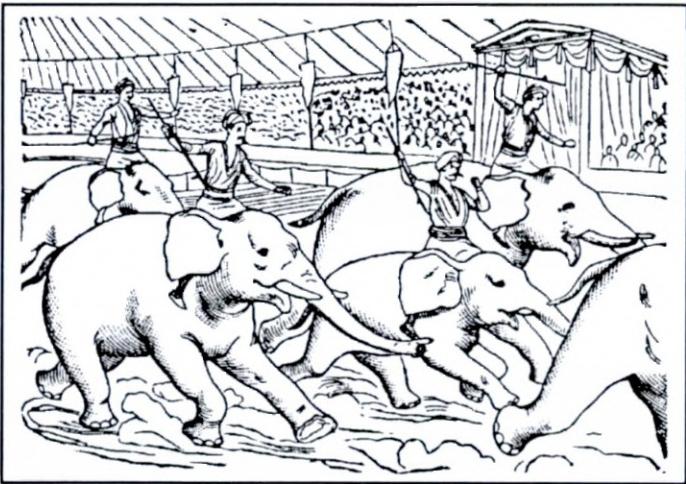
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Sells Brothers' Big Show of the World began its 1893 tour of Kansas with a two-column advertisement in the *Washington Republican* announcing its coming to that town on August 30, "Coming in All Its Entirety!" At the top of the ad was the modest admission that it was the "LARGEST AND BEST SHOW ON EARTH."

The "Unabridged and Unparalleled program, exalted in aim and pure in tone" was based on a "Three Ring Circus, Royal Hippodrome, Huge Elevated Stage, Five Continent Menagerie, African Aquarium, Australian Aviary, Arabian Caravan, Spectacular Pageants and Trans-Pacific Wild Beast Exhibit." Clearly, nothing that could amaze and instruct had been overlooked.

The Sells brothers boasted that, "Its Record is Unimpeachable, Imperishable, Unblemished, Above the Reach of Rivalry as the Stars are Above the Earth."

Illustration from an 1893 Sells Bros. newspaper advertisement. Pfening Archives.



The ad further proclaimed:

"200 All Star Arenic Artists 200

"100 Sensational and Startling Acts 100

"Real Roman Hippodrome sports, thrilling and spirited races of every age and nation. Heroes and Heroines of Horsemanship! Speedy Sports of Ancient Kingdoms!

"Races which surprise all turfites.

"50 Golden cages filled with rare wild beasts, embracing every captive beast known to exist 50

"Present more rare and exclusive features than all other shows combined.

#### "SELLS BROTHERS' ENORMOUS UNITED SHOWS!"

"The illustrious predecessor of all amusement alliances," the ad continued. "One million actually invested to perpetuate its grandeur. Don't fail to see the mightiest, richest, largest and most classic, picturesque and novel street parade ever seen in any city. Prodigal profusion of princely paraphernalia proudly presented in grand procession at Washington, at 10 o'clock on the morning of August 30."

Did anyone in Kansas believe the extravagant claims of the Sells brothers? Apparently thousands did, or at least believed some of the bombast, for everywhere the show exhibited, with one exception, huge crowds came to see "The Mighty Monarch of all Tented Exhibitions."

The press department used several handouts over and over in Kansas newspapers. Three of their handouts appeared in the *Republican* with headings of "The First and Greatest Show," "The Largest Show on Earth," and "Now For A Glorious Holiday." The latter two stories also appeared in Washington's other paper, the *Register*.

The following handout appeared in the *Register* and was typical of all of the show's handouts, all of which were paraphrases of the same announcement: "THE BIG SHOW OF THE WORLD. Twenty-second Annual Tour of Sells Brothers' Enormous United Shows.

"On August 30th, the famous Sells Brothers will visit Washington with their entire colossal unity of Circuses, Menagerie, Moorish Caravan and Spectacular Pilgrimage to Mecca. Regal Roman Hippodrome, Olympian Elevated Stages, Tropical Aquarium, Aviary, Royal Japanese Troupe, Arabian Nights Entertainment and splendid Free Street Parade. Had not Adam Forepaugh made his final exit from mortality's great arena, presumably to manage a galaxy of stars elsewhere, he would be forced to concede that Sells Brothers now have essentially the Greatest Show on Earth, and the only

legitimate one of its kind left. A menagerie which includes among many rare wild beasts the only pair of full grown giant Hippopotami, worth \$100,000, is something to boast of. Other notable exclusive features are a most singular Hairless Horse, a whole flock of stately Ostriches, and the tiniest pair of cattle ever known—veritable mites from elfdom. The

that their show is extraordinarily clean and meritorious, and that among their exhibits are animals and features that are not to be seen elsewhere. Their performing sea lions and seals are alone worth the entire price of admission, while their den of baby lions is a rare feature, as are also many of their animals and ring specialties. Altogether it is a refined show and worthy of confidence and patronage."

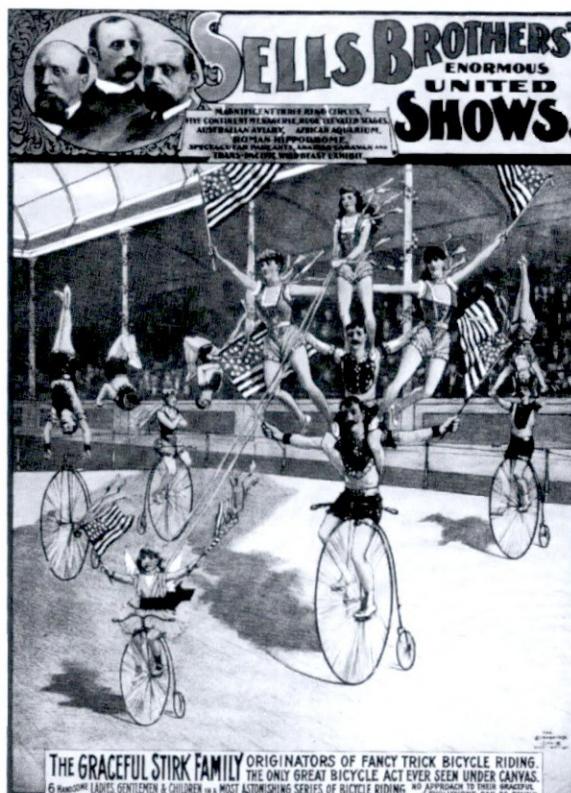
The story in the *Register* was probably written by the show's press agent.

Following Washington, Sells Brothers played several dates in Nebraska and Missouri, returning to Kansas for exhibitions at Paola on September 6.

The Paola *Miami Republican* carried an interesting review of circus day: "THE CIRCUS."

"Sells Bros.' circus spread its canvas in Paola on September 6. Most of modern shows travel by rail in their own cars and can be relied upon to come on time. This one showed in Warrensburg, Missouri Tuesday, and went from here to Yates Center, Kansas. In Missouri, owing to old race prejudice, separate seats have to be provided for whites and blacks, as they will not sit together. As soon as they cross the line into free Kansas, the distinction is abolished. The cost of transportation is a great item for shows in these days. As much as \$400 in one day is sometimes paid to the railroad, the larger shows requiring two and three trains, and of course having the use of that many engines. The cost of provisions for men and beasts is great. Many of the animals, those of the carnivorous species, have to be fed on fresh beef, and butchers do not sell to circuses for nothing, for they are strangers and in a hurry, and must have the stuff without delay. Sells Bros. carry 325 men and 260 horses. All these have to be fed daily, two or three times, and their bills for oats, hay, corn and groceries mount up. Ephraim Sells is general manager and Col. Seeley is press agent, and pays all bills presented. Both are courteous gentlemen, and stand high socially at home. All men who met Col. Seeley will testify to his gentlemanly deportment. His promise meant a performance, and all who met him would like to see him again.

"If the animal cages had been labeled it would have been quite a convenience to visitors. It seems a small thing, as the cost would be scarcely anything. There were three ostriches, and while they are curiosities, it would require a great stretch of imagination to say they are pretty. Many ladies wondered where the ostrich



Sells Bros. poster of the Stirk Family used in 1893. Pfening Archives.

program of Hippodrome races is upon a truly imperial scale, and introduces the greatest drivers, riders and athletes of both sexes, including an astonishing troupe of Berber and Bedouin gymnasts. The newly-devised spectacle of the Pilgrimage to Mecca will introduce many rich, striking and romantic novelties. Excursions on all railroads."

After the show had come and gone, the *Republican* reported that, "Sells Bros. show which was here last Wednesday, was without question the best that ever exhibited in this city. The street parade was the largest and the finest and the tented display and performances the best ever seen here. The show did not seem to be accompanied by the gang of toughs who usually come with the circus. On the other hand the managers and employees were universally gentlemanly and obliging."

The *Register* reported that: "We affirm that Sells Brothers are gentlemen of honor and fairness in their business dealings,

plumes came from, as their feathers would not indicate what part of their bodies produce them. Ostriches have very long necks and are said to fight with their feet and wings. The two hippotomi were immense. The performance of the learned seals beat anything. The man who stood in front of the reserved seats and stopped passers-by to 'take their picters' created great merriment. The 'Stirk family,' who used to travel with Barnum, are able to give all of the boys points on the matter of riding the wheel. There are six of them, since the baby has grown, large enough to mount, and their performance was one of the best things seen. Next to the Stirk family, the exhibition by two stalwart men of Greek and Roman posturing and imitations of classic statuary was probably the best thing. The horses were in good order, and seemed to be feeling well and able to do what was required of them.

In the matter of advertising, the sum paid out is quite large. The three newspapers in Paola, two in Osawatomie and one in Louisburg all had ads of Sells Bros. The advertising bills will aggregate between \$200 and \$300 per day. The winter home of the show is Columbus, Ohio, where Sells Bros. own the Columbus Buggy Works, which they advertise by a canvas sign at the main entrance of the circus.

The races stirred up a great dust, but the people sat patiently to the close of the last act. The mule race was very funny. The skillful driving of the charioteers and the dextrous avoidance of the many center poles lining the inside of the driveway shows the great training of the learned horses. One thinks of the Ben Hur (sic) chariot races at once on looking at them. It is supposed that men who travel with circuses have very hard work. One of the canvas men stated that their work would not average over six hours per day—three in the morning and three at night. They unload and put up the tents, and at night tear down and put them in the wagon and run the wagon on the cars. This work must be done in all weather. When there is a storm they have a tough job.

No fakirs are allowed with Sells Bros. and their grounds were entirely free of tough characters. They own the side show and all the candy, lemonade and peanut stands. Many shows 'farm these out,' and then disavow all responsibility for the acts of their keepers.

The city licenses which all large shows pay in Paola is \$50 per day. This was all

paid in half dollars. As soon as our banks opened the circus treasurer went to all of them to see how much silver they would take in exchange for bills. One took \$500 and the others a like proprietor. Formerly the show people bought New York drafts, but since the banks there refuse to pay except in clearing house checks, the circus people don't want N. Y. exchange.

The crowd was large, people all seemed to come in. Next to the one of last Fourth of July, Paola has not seen so many people within her borders for years. Very few arrests were made—comprising one plain drunk and a very few other misdemeanors. The man who pawns the cook stove to enable the family to buy tickets was on hand, and the people who have dodged their grocers for a year found money to go."

The editor failed to mention those who

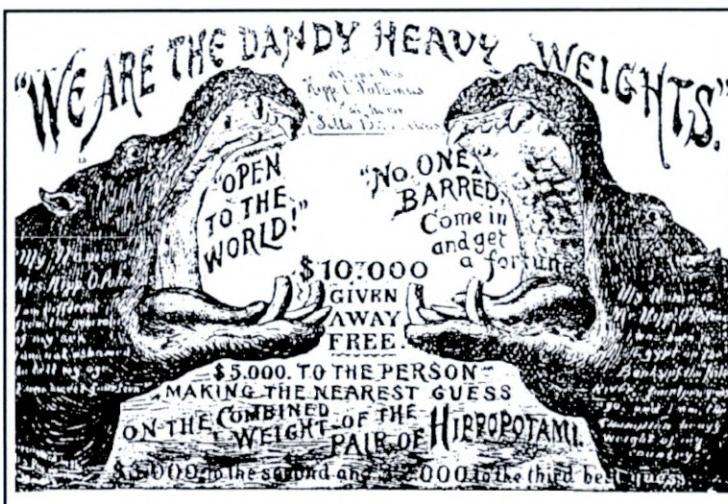


Illustration from an 1893 Sells Bros. newspaper advertisement. Pfening Archives.

were in arrears for their newspaper subscription.

The Yates Center *News* carried four insertions of a two-column ad heralding the exhibits of September 7. The advertisement, which had no illustrations provided enough text to satisfy the most interested reader.

"The Sempiternan Sponsors of the World's Greatest Sensations! Twenty-two years without faltering.

"Twenty-two years without changing name.

"Twenty-two years without changing management. Twenty-two years in the lead.

"Twenty-two years without discounting a single promise.

"Twenty-two years without defaulting.

"Twenty-two years without resorting to fraud.

"Twenty-two memorable years of un-

wavering loyalty to every pledge."

And more.

"It is the Largest Traveling Show On Earth. It is admitted by all disinterested people OTHER SHOWS Privately admit it, although for policy's sake, they may deny it.

"It has more people in its employ. This is never denied.

"It has the most noted performers. This is universally conceded.

"It uses the most cars to transport it. All railroad men know it.

"It is as superior to other shows as the Columbian exposition is to an ordinary pumpkin and quilt fair.

"It has the finest parade ever seen on any public streets in the world."

And more.

Every Kansas farm boy, of course, was familiar with 'The Sempiternam Sponsors.'

"Show day broke the record," according to the *News*. "The biggest crowd that ever assembled in Yates Center put in an appearance that day. A well dressed, well fed and apparently prosperous crowd from the farms and towns of the surrounding country came in for a day's relaxation."

In another column the *News* reported that, "Sells Bros.' shipped \$3,600 out of here last Friday morning by way of the Wells Fargo Express Co. They played to pretty good business here."

The Yates Center *Woodson Democrat* thought, "The most novel and entertaining features of the show (which alone were worth the price of admission) were the trained seals and sea lions and the representation of statuary. The latter was especially fine. Since Barnum's death, Sells Bros. take the lead."

September 7 was payday on the circus and the *Democrat* estimated that "nearly \$10,000 were sent from here by employees, through express and money orders during the day."

The *Democrat* ordered ten gross of the photographs taken on circus day by the local photographers, Capt. Hunt and Col. Trueblood. "We will mail them to all new subscribers free of charge and all old subscribers will be supplied with one of each upon settling up and paying one year in advance. They are perfect gems of art and no household is complete without them."

Yates Center schools opened September 4th, but on show day all students were released at 10:30.

After the exhibitions at Chetopa on September 9 Sells Bros. moved to Missouri re-

turning to Kansas for exhibitions at Horton on September 30.

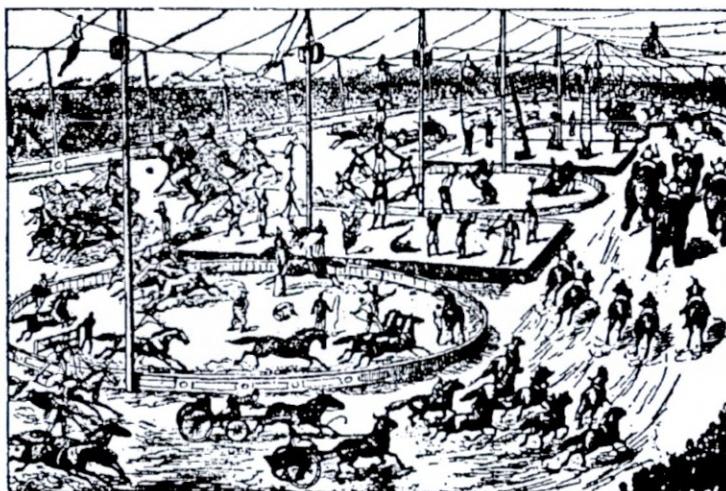
"Sells Bro's mammoth circus exhibited in Horton Saturday," according to the *Commercial*. "Although the ground was soaked and indications pointed to rain, there was a good crowd present."

Advertising car No. 1 arrived in Manhattan on September 11, and papered the town for the exhibitions there on October 2. Car No. 2 with a crew of "about a dozen men" appeared on the 25th.

The editor of the *Manhattan Mercury* was "outraged" when the park commission permitted Sells Bros. to set up in the city park. "This same commission made a vigorous kick against allowing ball games in the park, have seriously objected to permitting horsemen to use the track, and in fact made protest against anything in the way of amusements, other than an occasional Sunday school picnic, taking place inside the enclosure, but have now rented the grounds to a big circus outfit that will do more damage to the young trees, grass and grounds in the one day they are there, than would be done in ten years if the park is used as it has been. They will set their tents and make their ring right where the ball ground now is as it is the finest spot in the grounds, and their heavy loaded wagons will cut the roads as well as the turf. Teams will be hitched everywhere within the enclosure doing great injury to the trees and shrubbery. The few dollars received for use of the grounds will not begin to make good the damage. It is an outrage to permit such a thing and we believe a majority of our citizens will protest against this strange and decidedly foolish action of the park commission."

The fears of the editor were not realized to the fullest, and the editor reported following show day that "our park commissioners may thank their stars that the weather was favorable and that the circus did not damage the park to the extent that many feared it would. To say the least considerable damage has been done to the park, but if the park commission has been impressed with the duties to Manhattan by this mistake, the lesson will do good."

The city of Caldwell is located two miles north of the Oklahoma border. The opening of the Cherokee Strip to outside settlers drew thousands to southern Kansas in the hope of acquiring free land in Oklahoma. There was a mighty rush when the Strip was declared open on September 16. The town of Caldwell fur-



nished numerous seekers, and those who did not join the rush were so preoccupied with the Strip that there was slight interest in anything else, including Sells Bros.' Big Show of the World which billed Caldwell for October 5.

The *Caldwell Journal* on October 12 made the following report: "The people of Caldwell and vicinity evidently act on the supposition that they have recently been actors in a show with which even the Sells Brothers' circus, great as it is, cannot be compared. To this section the show of the 16th is not yet over. The spare time and money of our people are flowing into the development of the Strip and little interest is taken in the usual attractions of the road. Under ordinary conditions the Sells Brothers would have been enthusiastically received. As it is, the Sells Brothers circus was and was not a success last Thursday. It was a success in itself, but a financial failure. The street parade was fully up to the standard in quantity and quality, the menagerie was excellent, and the performance lacked neither skill nor variety. The small number of spectators seemed to draw all the spirit from the performers, which sent the interest down to zero point. The management decided that the patronage did not justify an evening performance, and the troupe left the city in the afternoon."

In the spring of 1893 the Sells brothers sent a letter to nearly every ed-

itor in Kansas complaining about their nephew, Willie Sells, and asking the paper to tell its readers that they had no connection with the Sells & Rentfrow show. Willie Sells did try to cash in on the Sells brothers' reputation while his show practised every sleazy scheme thinkable to cheat and rob its patrons. Willie's advertisements attempted to deceive the public into thinking that his show was that of the famous brothers. During the season of 1892 Willie waged a scurrilous war in the nation's press against his famous uncles, accusing them of gross unfairness and the persecution of himself through a desire for revenge.

Suits and counter suits were filed in profusion to the benefit of the lawyers and no one else.

In 1893 Sells Brothers' Big Show of the World exhibited in these Kansas towns: August 30, Washington; September 6, Paola; September 7, Yates Center; September 8, Independence; September 9, Chetopa; September 30, Horton; October 2, Manhattan; October 3, Abilene; October 4, Wellington; October 5, Caldwell (Matinee only).

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.

## FOR SALE BANDWAGON

Complete file (less one issue) starting January 1946 to present, plus several early mimeo issues starting 1943. Good condition.

Best offer received by May 20, 1994. No phone offers.

W. L. Porter, CHS #184  
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Beloit, WI 53511

# BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS

Pro. D.M. BRISTOL'S EQUESCURRICULUM



These animals walk up and down stairs  
of Opera Houses, and all appear upon  
the stage at one time, without bridle or  
rein, among whom are five stallions, one  
being the only milk-white horse in  
America.

We use no ring, and carry a flooring for  
the stage, and the necessary scenery,  
with the exception of ten wings. Want  
entire stage clear of other scenery. Gas  
and curtain men, ushers, ticket seller,  
tickets in advance, license and police.  
We want two insertions of six squares in  
each weekly newspaper, and five squares  
in each daily, six times previous to the  
date of our appearance, and three squares  
daily during the engagement. Bill post-  
ing and distributing, 200 bushels of  
sawdust. We play a week at each place,  
the usual matinees. Entertainment lasts  
two hours.

D. M. BRISTOL, Proprietor.  
JNO. C. PATRICK, Manager.

## EQUINE WONDERS

21 Perfectly Educated Horses

3rd AVE THEATRE NEW YORK, 4 WEEKS  
GRAND OPERA HOUSE BALTIMORE 6  
ACADEMY OF MUSIC, CHICAGO 6  
GLOBE THEATRE, BOSTON, 4  
CHESTNUT ST. THEATRE PHILA. 4  
AND ALL PRINCIPAL CITIES OF THE UNITED STATES



Decorately Oct 1 1886

C.B. Blinn, Esq.

Dear Sir:

Your favor of the recent date  
recd. yesterday. Enclosed Extracts

Prof. Bristol's horses played opera houses. The letterhead lists New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston and Chicago as cities played. Used in 1886 it is printed in black.

## FACTUAL CIRCUS & CARNIVAL BOOKS

"They Keep on Giving"

The Colorful World of the Circus - Davidsons 12.95

A Very Young Flyer (Tito Farfan)-Krementz 7.50

Mr Circus, Story of Hunt Bros. Circus 3.50

Carnival (factual carnival)-Arthur Lewis 5.95

The American Circus - Prof. Eckley 13.95

Great Days of American Circus - Amer. Heritage 12.50

One Horse Show, Story of Dan Rice - Kunzog 12.50

Tanbark & Tinsel - John Kunzog 19.95

Very Special People (Freaks)-Drimmer 7.95

Billers, Banners, Bombast-Fox & Parkinson 39.95

(All above books hard bound editions.)

The American Circus-John Culhane (Paperback) 19.95

World of Mirth Carnival-Goldsack 19.95

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Refundable on First Purchase

# Mike Martin's CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

## Cristiani Bros. Lithos

### HALF SHEETS - 22" X 28"

Titled - "The Greatest Riding Troupe of All Time", the gorgeous posters spring to life with huge images of the five Brothers leaping in unison onto horseback. Plus, cameo images of Lucio in comedy pose with Belmonte in mid-somersault.

The bright red, green, blue, yellow, black, orange and white colors are as vivid, as if they had just been printed!

In mint condition, these scarce lithos came from the billcar in the early 60's, and will be sent rolled.

**Limited Supply \$38.00 Ea. Postpaid.**



## Royal American Shows

### PUBLICITY MAGAZINE

Here's a real find! These 16 page, 8½" x 11" Publicity booklets are loaded with glossy color photos of "The Worlds Largest Midway".

Created as advertising/publicity pieces, these **rare all-photo magazines** cover the show train, rides, games and back end shows... and date from the end of the railroad days.

These are the last printed brochures of this type for RAS - know to millions as the "Most Beautiful Show on Earth"!

**Limited Supplies Mint \$11.50 Ea. Postpaid**

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:**

**MIKE MARTIN**

## "1994 Sarasota Circus Festival and Parade Highlights"

### VIDEO

All The Sights, Sounds And Excitement of "Circus Week" In Sarasota! The Big Top Performance Competitions, The Outdoor Thrill Circus, Animal Training Exhibitions - Plus, The "Mile Of Smiles" Circus Street Parade and More!

All Color! All Circus! 2 Full Hours

**Still Only \$29.50 Each Postpaid**

## King-Cristiani Heralds

Another rare one from 1953. These are the famous 10" x 28" pink & black sheets, profusely illustrated, front and back, with artwork and photos.

The text lists some of the great features - Hugo Zacchini, The Chambertys, Truzzi - plus the Enormous Free Street Parade!

These heralds were rolled and stored the past 41 years and are in mint condition.

**Limited Supply \$10.50 Each Postpaid**



Dept. BW - 16840 S.W. 62 St.  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33331  
Fla. residents add 6% Sales tax

# Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy

A Connecticut magazine recently wrote this about Adam Bardy's book:

"If you're still a kid at heart when the circus comes to town, you'll love Adam Bardy's life story of his adventures of circus life. Adam Bardy was born in Webster on May 21, 1907. Back in 1907 thousands of immigrants from Europe kept coming to America.

"Bardy's life might be compared somewhat to Mark Twain's boyhood heroes Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and back in 1907 in June, Mark Twain met George Bernard Shaw in London. It was a rainy Saturday when the Buffalo Bill Circus came to Webster. Adam Bardy was only 8 years old when he crawled into a circus wagon that night. However on Sunday morning when he crawled out of his hiding place, he wanted to get back home. Bardy had to have a guardian angel as he got back home before he was missed.

"In 1924 Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus played in Worcester. Bardy's interest in the circus was renewed and he got a job with the side show. The circus liked getting young men to join them because it was out of young people that real circus troupers were made.

"Bardy found that circus life in the roaring twenties was rough and tough. On sunny days it was wonderful, but on rainy days you went to bed in the circus cars with wet clothes, and you would have to wait for a sunny day to dry out. If you could put in a full circus season under these conditions, you would be called a real trouper. In the twenties Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey was a railroad circus. It traveled in four sections. The first section was the cookhouse crew along with some circus wagons that carried the cookhouse. The second section carried most of the circus wagons and the stock cars full of work horses and nearly all the working crew. The third section carried the wild animal cages. There were 43 elephants with the circus.

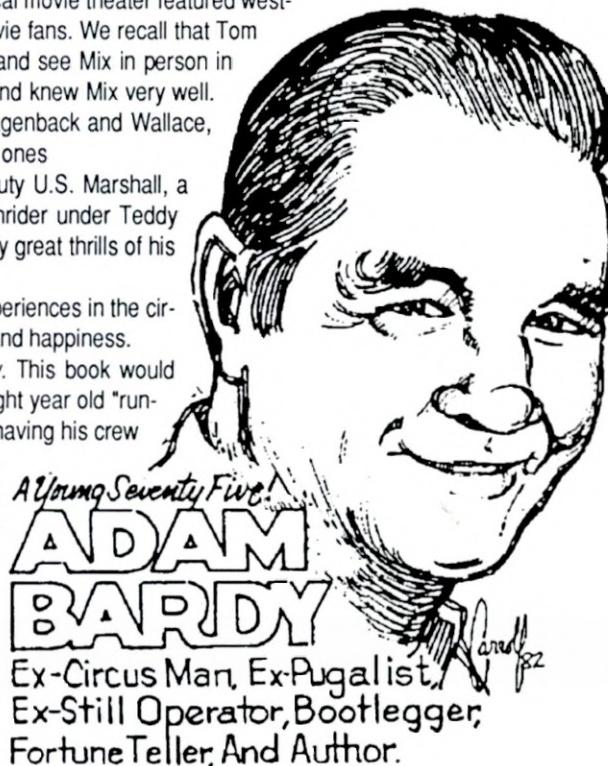
"One of our heroes was Tom Mix and on Saturday afternoon when the local movie theater featured westerns. Tom Mix and his wonder horse Tony was a favorite of young and old movie fans. We recall that Tom Mix was with the Sells Floto Circus and we were invited to attend the circus and see Mix in person in Willimantic. Adam Bardy was working with the Sells-Floto Circus at the time and knew Mix very well. There were more circuses in business in the twenties than there are now. Hagenback and Wallace, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, Sparks and Walter L. Main were some of the big ones.

"Few folks realized that Tom Mix was at one time a real sheriff, a Deputy U.S. Marshall, a Texas Ranger, a real cow puncher and ranch foreman. He was even Roughrider under Teddy Roosevelt. For Bardy to personally know and work with Mix was one of the truly great thrills of his wonderful life. Mix was one of the truly greats of the silent movies.

"Adam Bardy at the age of 86 can look back at his many adventurous experiences in the circus, life with Gypsies, fortune telling, bootlegging, marriages, and finding love and happiness.

"He has written a book *The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy*. This book would have made a wonderful movie with enough wholesome family desires of an eight year old "running away" for a day; joining the circus and becoming a boss canvasman and having his crew set up the big circus tent while still a teen-ager. Fortune telling, boxing, bootlegging, and after four score years becoming a successful author. With the right promotional agency, the life and adventures of Adam Bardy could be made into a television series that might parallel the Untouchables and Little House on the Prairie. Many men desire the anonymity of Mister X but Adam Bardy is a real Mr. X . . . Ex-Circus Man, Ex-Pugilist, Ex-Still Operator, Ex-Bootlegger, Ex-Fortune Teller, and an excellent author."

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of *Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy*, send check or money order for \$12.95 to:



**ADAM BARDY**  
87 Alm Rd.  
Thompson, CT 06277